

**THE
BARRIER**
BY
ALLEN FRENCH



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THE BARRIER

The Barrier

A Novel

By Allen French

Author of "The Colonials"



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To

C. E. S. AND S. P. S.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

IN THE ORDER OF THEIR MENTION

STEPHEN F. ELLIS, promoter and political boss.

GEORGE MATHER, a young business man.

JUDITH BLANCHARD, of the social set.

MRS. HARMON, who has risen by her marriage.

JUDGE ABIEL HARMON, advanced in years.

COLONEL BLANCHARD, Judith's father.

BETH, his remaining daughter.

MR. PRICE, the fashionable jeweller.

MR. FENNO, head of one of the old families.

MR. PEASE, a banker.

JIM WAYNE, of the social set.

MR. DAGGETT, a supporter of Ellis.

MISS JENKS, Mather's stenographer.

STOCK, a labor agitator.

THE BARRIER



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CHAPTER I

THE STATEMENT OF THE CASE

THERE is a certain circle so well-to-do that it is occupied chiefly in guarding its property and maintaining its exclusiveness. There is a city so small, politically, that it is buttoned in one man's pocket. The second of these is the direct consequence of the first. Leading families lead little except the cotillion, parvenus crowd in, and things are done at which no gentleman will soil his gloves.

In the course of time, such a community might develop a strong active class and a superb set of figure-heads, if only the two sorts would let each other alone. But the one will envy and the other sneer; the one will long for ornament and the other will meddle. A desire to sparkle meets the desire to appear to do, or at times encounters the genuine longing to do. Dirty hands will wish to be clean; clean hands must have a little honest dirt.

The city of Stirling lies in New England; it is one among those which look to Boston for supplies and to New York for fashions. Its history goes back to colonial times: hence those beautiful estates in the residential section and the air of pride in the scions of the old families. These said scions collect much rent and control much water-power, yet an inquirer imbued with the modern spirit might ask them to give an account

of themselves. Their forefathers settled the country, fought in the Revolution, and helped to build the nation and the State, but now people whisper of degeneration. In the old city modern men have risen to power, control the franchises, manage the local government, and are large in the public eye.

Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that one man does this. Ellis the promoter, Stephen F. Ellis, has grown from nothing to everything, has consolidated businesses, mastered the city affairs, holds all the reins, pulls all the wires. The reform politicians have never harmed him. The fashionable people, according to their wont, for years have avoided publicity and let things go. The man among them who, in a generation, alone has ventured into the field of thoroughly modern enterprise, has failed signally, though most gallantly, and in the prime of his youth stands amid the ruins of a career. The very honour which was his inheritance brought him low.

He had been a contrast to Ellis in the openness of his methods and the rapidity of his success. To organise all the street-railways of his city, to force his personality upon the stockholders of three lines, and to weld the old clumsy systems into one efficient whole—that was George Mather's achievement. To be head and shoulders above all others of his years as the street-railway president, yes, and as the man in whom the reform politicians built their best hopes—that was his pride, and his class was proud of him. But his strength was his weakness, for he used no trickery and he kept his word. Therefore by a business stroke undertaken against him in the face of an agreement, a method not so analogous to a stab in the back as to the adroit administering of poison in a loving-cup, Mather was upon a certain spring morning, at a certain stock-holders'

meeting, by a small but neat majority voted out of office, and stood robbed of the best fruits of his labours.

Those who saw him that afternoon upon the golf-course marvelled as he played his match with the precision of a machine. Had the man no nerves? But though thus he proved—to others, not to himself—that he could bear misfortune without flinching, it was with unspeakable relief that at last he slipped away into an empty corner of the club-house, whence he could hear only the buzz of the Saturday crowd on the grounds outside. The tension of the last few hours relaxed suddenly, and now that he was freed from the gaze of others he gave way almost to despair.

The silver cup which he had won he tossed upon the table, and dropping his clubs upon the floor he threw himself into a chair. Beaten! To have stood so high in the little city, to fall so suddenly, and to lose so much! True, he had made money; he had gained the support of the rich men of his class, who had assured him that they would wait their chance to set him again in his place. But it was Ellis who had seized that place: when had Ellis ever given up anything which he had gained? Yet it was not Mather's fall, nor the hurt to his pride, nor even the loss of the chance to carry out his plans, which shook him most, but the danger to still dearer hopes. And the young man, almost groaning, dropped his head upon his breast.

A girl entered the room suddenly, and stood startled at the sight of him, but she was not heard. She wished to withdraw, yet feared to rouse him, and his deep frown fascinated her. Staring downward, scowling with his thoughts, his face had at first expressed anger, but now showed pain. Judith, too, he was thinking—had she changed to him? When he hurried to her after this morning's meeting, so soon as he could free

himself from his friends, already she had heard the news. She had not let him speak with her alone, but though she must have known his wish she kept her father in the room. If with her ambitions she felt disappointed in him, if she rejected him—well, he could bear even that! The girl who was watching saw his expression change to determination, and then suddenly he roused himself. No one should find him brooding. As he raised his eyes from the carpet she turned to escape, but he saw her and sprang to his feet.

"Judith!" She stopped; perceiving her desire he added: "Don't let me keep you."

Then she came to him directly. "I thought you were outdoors. Every one was congratulating you; the club has never seen such golf. It was splendid!"

He smiled, indifferent to the praise, and picking up the cup from the table, looked at it carelessly. "Only for that."

"And Jim Wayne would give his head for it," she said.

Disdainfully, he shifted the cup into his palm, and with a single effort crushed it out of shape. "See," and he meant to personify himself, "it is only silver; it lacks strength."

"Ah," she answered, "don't be bitter. Come, forget the street-railroad, forget you ever were its president, forget everything except your friends."

"Judith," he returned with meaning, "can *you* forget what I have lost?"

She drew back, flushing. "George!"

"Oh," he cried, "I know I am rude! But to-day when I came to see you, you knew what had happened to me. If ever I needed comfort it was then, and you knew it. There was only one consolation that would help me, and you knew that, but you denied me. Judith, have I lost my chance with you?"

She flushed, as if conscience drove home a rebuke. "I did not mean to be unkind." But then she looked about uneasily, at the door at her back, and at the curtains which shut off the adjoining room. "I—I think I must go."

"No," he protested. "Let us have it out; no one is near. Give me my sentence, Judith. You know I've loved you for years. It was for you I built up the railroad; you are the impelling cause of all my work. This winter I thought I had pleased you. Is there any hope for me?"

He spoke without a tremor of the voice, but he clenched his hands as he waited for her answer, and his eyes were eager. Before them she dropped her own. "Not now," she answered.

"Tell me," he asked almost gently, "why you have changed."

She stood silent, with her eyes still downcast, but her mouth grew harder.

"No, don't explain," he said quickly. "I understand. I understood when I left your house to-day. Judith, don't you know that I have learned to read you? This morning I was beaten, and you require of a man that he shall succeed."

Her eyes flashed up at him. "Well," she demanded, "and if I do? Can I be different from what I am?"

"We make ourselves," he replied.

Her defiance was brief, and she asked earnestly: "Why have you let me plague you so? Choose again, some softer woman."

"My choice is fixed," he answered simply.

"Then at least," she said, "we will remain friends?"

His face cleared, and he smiled. "So far as you permit."

"But without enthusiasm," she reproached him.

"Ah, Judith," he answered, "you know you don't require it."

"And we won't speak of this again?" she asked.

"Just these last words," he said. "Remember that this defeat is not the end of me; I shall yet give an account of myself." She saw how resolute were his eyes, but then his look again became gentle as he added: "And this, too. The world fascinates you. But Judith, it is very big, and strong, and merciless!"

Was it not a beaten man who spoke? She answered, "I do not fear it," and studied him to find his meaning.

But with a steadiness which allowed no further show of feeling he replied: "If ever you do, then turn to me."

They finished without words of parting; she quitted him abruptly, he took up the caddy-bag and stuffed the ruined cup in among the clubs. Though she paused an instant at the door, there was nothing more to be said. Regretfully he watched her go: bright, fearless, and inquisitive as she was, where was her nature leading her? He knew her restless energy, and at the moment feared for her more than for himself.

As for her, he had pricked her deeply by his warning. The world would never be too much for her. Let it be however big and strong, she admired it, must learn about it! She would never cry for mercy. The thought did not cross her mind that he knew the world better than she, that although defeated he was more its master. At twenty-three one is confident.

And as for his charge that she thought less of him, she told herself that it was not his disaster that separated them. Rather it was the quality which the disaster had but emphasised in him—the self-confidence, real or counterfeit, with which he had always assumed that he could go his own way in making a home in which to take

care of her. How he mistook her! She did not ask for safety from the world; it was the key to her whole character that she wished to be more than a mere comfort to a man. Should she ever accept a husband, she must be an active rather than a passive element in his strength, counselling, inspiring, almost leading him. Between herself and Mather there was an unremitting conflict of will. She left the club-house, and went out upon the lawn with her cheeks a little redder than usual, her black eye brighter, her head held still more high.

Men came instantly about her—young men eager to please. But with her thoughts still busy, she measured them and found them lacking; they had never done anything—they had not yet arrived. The most masterly of them all she had left in the club-house, and he, after climbing to high place, had fallen. Was it possible that the only men of power were older still? Then she progressed to a still more searching question. Could this vapid and ambitionless assembly produce real men?

CHAPTER II

WHICH ENLARGES THE STAGE

ON the day which brought to Mather his two crushing defeats, the cause of them, Ellis, that type of modern success, openly embarked upon his latest and his strangest venture. Not satisfied with his achievements, and burning with the desire for recognition, he, whose power was complete in every part of the city save one, turned to that quarter where alone he had met indifference, and began his campaign against the citadel of fashion. The guests at the golf-club tea were somewhat startled when, at the side of their latest parvenue, whose bold beauty and free ways they had not yet learned to tolerate, they perceived the man whose characteristics—a short figure and large head, thinly bearded, with sharp features and keen eyes—were known to all students of contemporary caricature. Ellis was received with the coolness which his companion had foreseen.

"They won't like it, Stephen," she had said when he proposed the undertaking to her. "So soon after this morning, I mean; you know Mr. Mather is very popular."

"I'll take the risk," he answered.

"I don't see why you bother," she went on. "It's been easy enough for me, marrying the Judge, to go where I please—and yet it's a continual struggle, after all. It isn't such fun as you'd think, from outside."

He scowled a partial acquiescence. Living near the social leaders, it had been an earlier hope that to be their

neighbour would open to him their doors. He had built himself that imposing edifice upon the main street of fashion, so that where the simple Georgian mansion of the Waynes had stood the Gothic gorgeousness of a French château forced attention. But in spite of the money he lavished there, it had not taken Ellis long to discover that the widow Wayne, who was his neighbour still (having refused to part with the original homestead of the family), had more honour in her little clapboarded cottage than he in his granite pile. The widow's son, who nodded so carelessly to Ellis when they met, and yet was but a broker's clerk, had with his youth and grace a more valuable possession still—his name.

Sometimes Ellis felt it almost too exasperating to live among these people and be ignored by them, yet he gritted his teeth and stayed, thinking that perseverance must win in the end, and perceiving that from the midst of his enemies he might best plan his campaign. He spun his webs with unconquerable patience, studying the social news with the same keenness which he brought to the stock-market reports, and looking ahead to a possible combination which would give him the opportunity he desired. And now he believed that at last he actually saw his chance, and his hopes were rising.

"Maybe I'm a fool," he said, "but by Gad I'll at least have one look inside, and see what others find there. I notice that you worked hard enough to get in, and now you work to stay. But, Lydia, if you want to keep these people to yourself——"

"The idea!" she cried. "You are welcome to them."

"Or if you think I shall hurt your position——"

He paused for a second disclaimer, but none came; his directness had confused her, and he knew he had struck near the truth. "Anyhow," he finished, "you promised me this long ago, and I'll keep you to the bargain."

Now she, the maker of this promise to Ellis, was the wife of Judge Abiel Harmon, whose ancient family, high position, and fine character were everywhere honoured. Nevertheless, Ellis was able to regard her as his entering wedge, for they had been boy and girl together in the same little town. While yet in his teens he went to try his chances in the city; years afterward, when her ripe charms had captivated the old Judge, she found her fortune and followed. When she met Ellis again their social positions were widely different, but interest drew the two together, and though the Judge had no liking for Ellis, he did not inquire what Mrs. Harmon did with her leisure; therefore she maintained with the promoter an intimacy which to them both promised profit. To him the first advantage was this visit to the golf club, but while on inspection of the crowd he knew he could buy up any member of it at a fair valuation, they did not appear to like him the better for that, and their groups melted marvellously before him. As a relief, Mrs. Harmon took him to the clubhouse, but the dreary promenade through its rooms, where her vocabulary was exhausted and her enthusiasm lapsed, became at last an evident failure. When she had said all that she could of the conveniences of the lower floor she led him to the stairs.

"If you care to go up," she suggested, "the bedrooms might interest you."

But she looked out on the lawn through the open door, and longed to be there. The chattering groups called to every instinct of her nature; she wished to get rid of this encumbrance—to hand him over to any one and take her pleasure as she was used. And Ellis, too, looked out through the doorway.

"Up-stairs is more likely to be stupid," he said bluntly. "Let's go outdoors again."

In Mrs. Harmon's relief, she did not notice the characteristic which he displayed in this answer. Ellis was a fighter; power was all very well, but the winning of it was better. Just now he was like Alexander before India—looking upon a domain which must be his, and eager for the struggle. These people, and they alone, could put the capstone to the pyramid of his successes, and could lend glamour, if not give glory, to that wholly material structure. He would force them to it! Watching society disport itself, he regarded it as his natural prey. That assemblage was characterised by a suavity which deceived him; as he viewed the throng it seemed all mildness, all amiability. He did not appreciate the power of resistance of the apparently soft people.

And yet he had learned that money was not the effective weapon he had once supposed it. The arrogance of possession was against him, and though he did not understand the subtle reasons for his exclusion, he was sure that something besides a golden key was needed to open those doors.

It was not in Ellis to remake himself, nor did he try to change his ways. As when he faced the difficulty of buying the city government, he merely studied human weaknesses. The former experience had taught him that men are easier bribed without money than with, and that there are some passions, some ambitions, which do not include financial ease. Moreover, he had formed his plan; it was time to make the attempt.

"Miss Judith Blanchard—she is here?" he asked.

Mrs. Harmon looked at him in surprise. Did he wish to meet a girl? So far she had conducted the enterprise, and since their entrance on the grounds had tried to help him by introductions to the older people. But

the experiment had failed, and he had no intention of repeating it.

"Why, she is here," she answered in doubt.

"Then introduce me to her," he directed brusquely.

Oh, if he wished! Mrs. Harmon was not pleased to be so ordered; she was not at all satisfied with her day. It was very troublesome, this trying to introduce Ellis. The manner of Mrs. Watson had been more distant than ever, while as for Mrs. William Fenno, her behaviour had been arctic. Mrs. Harmon cared for no further snubs, but if Ellis wished to run the risk of the meeting—well, Judith would fix him! Not pausing to watch the process, Mrs. Harmon presented Ellis to the young lady and escaped to her own enjoyments.

Ellis was where he had many times imagined himself, standing before Judith Blanchard, while the young men fell away on either side. He was meeting her glance, he was seeing for himself the "queenly form," the "regal head" (*vide* the social columns of the *Herald*), and he was experiencing at close hand the influence of her personality. It was magnetic even to him, for on hearing his name she turned quickly, looked him straight in the eye, and offered him her hand almost as a man would have done. When she spoke her voice had not the artificial tones of the women he had so far met; it had a genuine ring.

"So you are Mr. Ellis?"

"You know of me, then?" he asked.

"Every one has heard of you, even girls," she replied. Any one might have said this, but not with her look, not with that bright glance. She asked another question, which showed to those who listened her interest in the man. "You have settled the water-works affair?"

John Trask turned and strolled away; Will Mayne

bowed to Miss Blanchard and silently betook himself elsewhere; Ripley Fenno mumbled a request to be excused, and left Miss Blanchard alone with her new acquaintance. Within five minutes, five times as many people were watching the pair curiously, but absorbed in a new interest, they did not notice.

"What do you know," he asked her, "about the water-works?"

But she pursued her own inquiries. "Or does the street-railway not take up your time? Or perhaps," she added boldly, "the court-house has no need of the services of its contractor."

Now the boldness of this last remark consisted in the reminder of a certain scandal, public-minded citizens (of whom the chief was Judge Harmon) claiming that there had been boodlery in the recent repairs of the court-house. It was more than hinted that Ellis had backed the contractors, and that he had shared the profits. His face changed, therefore, as she spoke, and she saw in his eyes a sudden gleam—of anger?

"Or," she asked quickly, "have I misread the papers, and you are not the contractor, after all?"

He was himself again, although looking—staring, almost—with deeper interest. At first he said no more than "I am not the contractor," but to himself he was crying: Success! He believed she had provoked him deliberately; he saw that she had studied his doings, for the court-house affair was almost a year old, the water-works deal occurred months ago, and the street-railway *coup* was of this very day.

"How much you know of matters!" he cried.

"I read the newspapers," she explained, "and with an object."

"An object?" he asked.

"I want to know what is going on," she explained.

"I want to have to do with real things. I am interested in the doings of *men*, Mr. Ellis." And she made him a little bow, which he, still staring, made no attempt to answer. Then she turned, and walked toward a more open space where people could not, as they were beginning to do, press around them. "Will you not come and see the grounds?" she asked. In great satisfaction he kept at her side.

So this was Judith Blanchard! He had not believed it, had laughed at himself for hoping it, but she was what he had imagined her. Months of study had gone to make up his opinion of her; he had read of her, heard of her, watched her. Quick, impetuous, somewhat impatient of conventions—that was Judith.

"Do you know," she asked suddenly, "that we have met before? In a street-car, not a fortnight ago, we rode facing each other for quite a while. I remember meeting your eye."

He had recalled it many times. "I hope I didn't look too much at you," he said. "You must be used to having people watch you."

"Oh, please don't compliment," she interrupted, "or you will spoil my idea of you. I imagine you a man who thinks to the point, and speaks so, too. Yes, people do watch me wherever I go; they give me flattery, and think I love it. But if you and I are to be friends——"

"Friends!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

"Are you not willing?"

"Willing!" he repeated. "Miss Blanchard, you offer what I had not dared to hope one person here would think of in connection with me. I——" He looked at her searchingly. "You are not teasing me?"

"I used a strong word," she said.

"Then you did not mean it?"

"Why," she endeavoured to explain, "I spoke hastily. I have few friends."

"Few friends? You?"

"Yes, I," she answered. "Among the men, I mean. Those of my age are so"—and she smiled—"so young! I am not posing, Mr. Ellis."

Nor was she. Her interest in the great world was genuine, even if ill-balanced. Ruled by it, she looked into men and discovered, not how much there was in them, but how little they had for her. The good, the amiable, the well-intentioned, had none of them enough backbone to suit her; it was power that she wished to find. Always among respectable people, she was often impatient at their mediocrity; always among young people, she was tired by their immaturity. This day she had for the first time questioned if older people of another class had not more for her; she had been repeating the question at the moment when Ellis was presented. And now, without pose, she scrutinised him with frank question: Was he one who could bring an interest into her life and let her see the workings of the world?

And he knew she was not posing. "It is sometimes troublesome to be friends with people," he said. "To be bound to them, to have considerations of them prevent free action—that is what friends mean in business."

"And you have few, as well?"

"I have dependents."

He spoke wisely, for the term struck her. Dependents! She had felt isolation, but it was that of the looker-on. There was something regal in this man's loneliness, for that he was lonely she divined.

"People need you," she said with approval. "They cannot get along without you. Oh!" she exclaimed, "I have sometimes thought what power is in the hands

of such men as you. You can mould a whole community; you can set your mark on a city so that it will tell of you forever." Behind a steady face he concealed astonishment and question. "You can do so much good!" she finished.

"Much good—yes," he returned uncertainly. Such enthusiasm was new to him, especially when applied to what the opposition newspapers bluntly called "jobs." He perceived that where he saw only money in his enterprises, Judith saw great opportunities. "Yes, much good—if we can only do it. Where there is power there is also responsibility. How can a man know whether he is doing the right thing, especially"—and he smiled—"when all the newspapers say he is doing wrong?"

"A man must follow his conscience," she replied, so gravely that he was uncomfortable, for, thus innocently spoken, her words carried a sting. He tried to finish the subject, and by his usual method—by meeting it directly.

"A man works as he can," he said, "doing what seems best. He has to think of the present, but as you seem to know, he works for the future too. It is an interesting life and a busy one."

"Interesting?" she echoed. "Oh, it must be! Why should it not be all-sufficient? Why should you come here?" He stared at her again, and she asked: "What have we that can interest you?"

He answered with a simplicity that was almost great, an acknowledgment of his desires which was unparalleled in his career, but which meant that without hesitation he put himself in her hands, to betray if she wished, but perhaps to save. He waved his hand toward the groups behind him.

"I want to get in," he said.

"To get in?" She smiled, and he doubted. "To get in, when I sometimes wish to get out? In here it's so dull!"

"I don't care for that," he replied.

"Sit down, then," she directed. "Let us talk it over."

Seated on a bench, half-facing, each had a moment to consider. She did not take it; he did, for he was beginning to recover himself and to study her. Beauty and grace, with that direct glance and genuine voice, were her chief outward characteristics. Of her inward motives, most prominent appeared her desire for something new; more strong, perhaps, was her interest in matters beyond her sphere. This interest of hers was to him a gift of fortune; it might bring him anywhere. But to Judith this situation was new; therefore she enjoyed it. She paused no longer than to consider what she should ask him next, and then pursued the subject.

"How have you meant to go about it?" she inquired.

"Why," he hesitated, "my friends——"

"What friends?"

He acknowledged frankly: "I have but one—Mrs. Harmon."

"Oh, only Mrs. Harmon?"

Only! The tone and the word struck him. Was Mrs. Harmon, then, not fully in? His mind reached forward blankly: who else could help him?

"But you must know some of our men," she suggested.

"Business acquaintances, yes," he said. "Yet they take care that I shall remain a business acquaintance merely. No, I must reach the men through the women."

"And the women?" she asked. "How will you reach them? Mrs. Fenno, for instance, knows only one kind;

she is iron against innovation. How will you get on her list, or Mrs. Watson's, or Mrs. Branderson's?"

He did not answer. She saw that he was biting on the problem, and that it did not please him. She made a positive statement.

"No. It is the men you must rely on."

And he, weighing the facts, believed her, though it went against his former notions. The women—this day he had first seen them at close quarters, and had felt them to be formidable creatures. The severe majesty of Mrs. Fenno—how could he impress it? And Mrs. Branderson had, beneath the good humour of her reception of him, the skill to chat easily, and then to turn her back without excuse. He bit his mustache—the women!

She was watching him with a half-smile. "Do you not agree?"

"But which men, then?" he inquired.

"Have you no influence over a single one?"

"There is young Mather," he said thoughtfully.

Her manner changed; she drew a little more within herself, and he noted the difference in her tone as she asked: "You have some connection with him?"

"None," he said. "But I can help him."

"How?"

"He is out of work," Ellis explained. "He will be fretting his heart out for something to do. I could offer him some position."

"Do!" she said. "He is right here.—George!" she called.

CHAPTER III

SETS THE BALL TO ROLLING

No young man can bear to sit down idly under misfortune; but though the chief results of Mather's work were lost to him, and his great plans—his subway—swept away, and though his defeat rankled, he had not suspected personal feeling in Ellis's action. The promoter had merely stretched out his hand and taken, repudiating the pledges of those who spoke in his name.

Therefore, in spite of the little shock which Mather felt when he saw Ellis with Judith, he came forward and greeted politely. It was a chance, of course, to "get back"; it would have been easy to express surprise at the promoter's presence, and to ask how he liked the club now that he really was there. Mather felt the temptation, but there was too much behind his relations with Ellis for the younger man to be rude, and he presently found himself saying: "I don't suppose you play golf, Mr. Ellis?"

"No," Ellis answered. This was the first man who had greeted him freely that day, and yet the one who most might feel resentment. While his manner showed that he was about to speak again, Ellis looked the other over with a smile which concealed deliberation. It was not weakness that made Mather mild, in spite of Mrs. Harmon's belief, to which she clung the more because the Judge rejected it. "I knew his father," her husband had told her. "They are bulldogs

in that stock." Ellis took much the same view; once, at the beginning of his career, he had encountered Mather's father, and had found him a bulldog indeed. The son seemed the same in so many respects that Ellis wondered if he had thought quite long enough in seizing this morning's opportunity. He knew well that Mather would be stronger when next he entered the arena; besides, the reform politicians, those bees who buzzed continually and occasionally stung, had been after the young man, who, with the leisure to enter politics, might be formidable. Thus Ellis, hesitating, ran over the whole subject in his mind; and then, as he knew how to do, plunged at his object.

"Mr. Mather, I am sorry for what happened this morning."

"Fortune of war," returned the other.

The young man certainly had a right to be bitter if he chose, judging, at least, by the usual conduct of victims. Mather's peculiarity in this did not escape Ellis, who spoke again with some hope of forgiveness. "I trust that you and I may some day work together."

"I scarcely expect it," was the answer.

"Don't say that." Ellis was not sure what tone to adopt, but did his best. "This is not the place to speak of it, perhaps, but there is surely something I can do for you."

"Now that you have nothing to do, you know," said Judith.

Mather turned to her; he saw how she had put herself on Ellis's side; how her interest in this offer was due to Ellis, not to himself. And the reminder of his defeat was most unwelcome.

"Since this morning," he said, "I have been offered three positions."

"Oh!" cried Judith. The involuntary note of sur-

prise showed how she had underrated him, and Mather bit his lip.

Ellis spoke. "If you will take a position on the street-railroad——"

"Nothing subordinate there!" cut in Mather very positively.

"Then," said Ellis, "if you care to be the head of the water company——"

"Oh!" Judith exclaimed before Ellis had completed his offer. "Such an opportunity!"

Mather himself looked at Ellis in surprise. It was an opening which, coming from any other source, he would have accepted eagerly, as a task in which he could give free play to all his powers. Did Ellis really mean it? But the promoter, having swiftly asked himself the same question, was sure of his own wisdom. The place needed a man: here was one. Besides, Ellis would have given much to tie Mather to him.

"I mean it," he said positively.

"You must accept," added Judith.

It was too much for Mather to bear. His defeat by Ellis and his loss of Judith—both of these he could sustain as separate calamities. But when he saw her thus siding with his victor, Mather forgot himself, forgot that Ellis was not a man to defy lightly, and spoke the impolitic truth.

"I could not work with Mr. Ellis under any circumstances!"

"George!" cried Judith hotly.

Then there was silence as the men looked at each other. Had Judith been the woman that in her weaker moments she was pleased to think herself, she would have studied the two. But she was neither cool nor impartial; she had put her feelings on Ellis's side, and looked at Mather with indignation. She missed, there-

fore, the pose of his head and the fire of his eye. She missed as well the narrowing of Ellis's eyes, the forward stretch of his thin neck—snaky actions which expressed his perfect self-possession, and his threat. Neither of them spoke, but Judith did as she turned away.

"You are very rude," she said coldly. "Come, Mr. Ellis, let us walk again." Ellis followed her; Mather stood and watched them walk away.

"It was shameful of him," said Judith when she and Ellis were out of hearing.

"He is young," remarked the other. He was watching her now, as he had watched Mather, out of narrow eyes. Mather's words meant a declaration of interest in Judith, confirming gossip. She was supposed to have refused him, and yet she was biting her lip—would she be quite so moved if Mather had not the power to do it? Ellis promised himself that he would remember this.

"He will know better some day," he said. "But at least he is out of the question. Can you not suggest some one else?"

"There is Mr. Pease," she answered.

Pease and himself—oil and water! How little she knew! and he almost laughed. But he answered meditatively: "He is very—set."

"I see my father is coming for me," she said.

"Let me ask you this, then," he begged quickly. "May I come to see you—at your house?"

"I am afraid not—yet," she answered. She was not ungracious, and continued with much interest: "But Mr. Ellis, I shall be so anxious to hear how it all goes. I am sorry I cannot help you with the men, but the principle is [she thought of Mather] choose the weak ones, not the strong. Here is my father. Father, this is Mr. Ellis."

Colonel Blanchard was affable. "How de do?" he said breezily. "Fine day for the match, Mr. Ellis."

"A very fine day," answered Ellis, pleased by the way in which the Colonel looked at him; Blanchard seemed interested, like his daughter. But Judith thought that the conversation had best end there.

"The carriage has come?" she asked.

"Yes," answered the Colonel. "Beth is in it, waiting for us. You know she goes out to dinner." He begged Ellis to excuse them, and so carried his daughter away.

Ellis looked after them; these two, at least, had treated him well. The Colonel had stared with almost bourgeois interest, as if impressible by wealth and power. Ellis mused over the possibility of such a thing.

"The weak," he said, repeating Judith's words. "The weak, not the strong."

Then Mrs. Harmon swooped down on him. "Here you are," she said petulantly. "Everybody's going. Let us go too."

CHAPTER IV

AN UNDERSTANDING

MRS. HARMON was very petulant; indeed, her aspect in one of lower station would have been deemed sulky. Reviewing the afternoon, she was convinced that to have brought Ellis there was a great mistake. Why should she take up with him, anyway? He could give her nothing but—trinkets; the old acquaintance was not so close that she was bound to help him. It had been condescension on her part; she might as well stop it now; yes, she might as well.

Yet she thought with some uneasiness of those trinkets. To accept them had not bound her to him, had it? Their money value was nothing to him. She could break from him gradually—that would be simple enough—and she could make a beginning on the drive home, for silence could show her feelings.

Ellis understood her after one glance, which expressed not only his impatience with her instability, but also a sudden new repulsion. The afternoon had opened his eyes to what the finer women were. How could he have supposed that Mrs. Harmon was really in the inner circle? How she contrasted with Judith! She seemed so flat beside the girl; she was his own kind, while Judith was better. He wished that he might drop the woman and pin his hopes to the girl.

But he could not spare Mrs. Harmon, and he had no fear that she would drop him, for he knew all her weaknesses. She was ambitious to a certain degree,

but after that, lazy; she was fond of comfort, fond of—trinkets, with a healthy indifference to ways and means. In fact, although Ellis did not so phrase it, there was a barbaric strain in her, a yearning for flesh-pots and show, in which her husband's tastes and means did not permit her to indulge herself. Ellis knew that he could manage her.

"Lydia," he said, "I want to thank you for the afternoon. It must have been a great bother to you. I'm afraid I spoiled your fun."

She could but respond. "Oh, not much."

"Look here," he went on. "You know me, I think; we understand each other pretty well. These people," and he waved his hand to include the whole golf club, "are not to be too much for us. Do you mind my saying a few words about myself?"

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed with involuntary interest; for he seldom spoke his thoughts.

"That girl, Miss Blanchard," he said, "was very good to me."

"She was?" Mrs. Harmon could not subdue an accent of surprise, but hastened to explain. "I've sometimes found her haughty."

"I shan't forget you introduced me to her," said Ellis. "I mean to follow up my acquaintance there."

"No girl," suggested Mrs. Harmon, "has much influence. No unmarried woman, I mean."

"But when Miss Blanchard marries she will have it then?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Harmon thoughtfully, and then very positively: "Yes, I think she would be a leader of the younger set."

"I am sure she would." Ellis nodded confidently. Judith had faults, notably rashness, but under wise guidance she could develop masterly qualities.

"But why——" began Mrs. Harmon in some perplexity. Then she caught sight of her companion's expression. "What! you don't mean to say that you—you would?"

"Why not?" asked Ellis. "Is it so very strange?"

"You are over forty!" cried Mrs. Harmon.

"Nothing to do with the case," he replied shortly.

"N-no," agreed Mrs. Harmon slowly. "No, I believe not—not with Judith." She looked at her companion with sudden respect. "I believe you've hit upon it! I didn't know you thought of anything of the kind."

"I need you, just the same," said Ellis. "You will help me?"

"Yes, yes," she replied. She felt a nervous inclination to giggle. "It's a big affair."

"All the more credit if you engineer it," he answered, and shrewdly, for she felt stimulated. If *she* could engineer it! Then she could plume herself in the face of Mrs. Fenno, and would always have a strong ally in Judith.

"Yes," she cried eagerly, "it will mean a great deal to—to everybody if it happens. Why, I could——"

But Ellis would not let her run on. "Do you know her well?" he interrupted.

"I will know her better soon," she stated.

"Not too quick," he warned, fearing that she might blunder. "You know yourself that she is not a girl to be hurried. Tell me, now, what men are there of her family?"

"Only her father."

"And what sort of man is he?"

Mrs. Harmon's vocabulary was not wide. "Why, spreading," she explained. "Jaunty, you know."

"And his circumstances?"

"He is well off," she answered. "Keeps a carriage and spends freely. There was money in the family, and his wife had some too. You know how those old fortunes grow."

Or disappear, thought Ellis; he had been investigating the Colonel's standing. "Miss Blanchard has no cousins?" he asked aloud. "No other men attached to her?"

"Attached in one sense," she replied, "but not connected."

"Much obliged," he said. "Now, Lydia, if we stand by each other——"

Mrs. Harmon had forgotten her earlier thoughts. "Of course!" she cried. "Oh, it will be so interesting!"

Ellis added the finishing touch, abruptly changing the subject. "You have been to Price's recently?"

Now Price was the fashionable jeweller, and few women were indifferent to his name. Mrs. Harmon, recollecting the cause of her recent visit there, saw fit to be coy.

"Oh, yes," she said, turning her head away. "He keeps asking me to come."

"He's always picking up pretty things," said Ellis approvingly. "Did he have anything special this time?"

"Something of Orsini's," replied Mrs. Harmon, struggling to appear indifferent. For they had been lovely, those baroque pearls so gracefully set in dusky gold. Price had made her try the necklace on, and she had sighed before the glass. "I wish he wouldn't pester me so," she said irritably. "He knows I can't afford them."

"He knows you have taste," Ellis said warmly. "He calls it a great pleasure to show things to you."

"I know," she replied, mollified. "I think he means to flatter me. But, Stephen, it's getting late, and I must dress for the Fennos' ball this evening."

"Then," responded Ellis, "I will stop at Price's on my way down-town."

"Naughty! naughty!" she answered, but she radiated smiles.

Ellis, after he had left Mrs. Harmon at her door, went, as he had promised, to the establishment of the pushing Mr. Price, and asked for the proprietor.

"Got anything to show me?" Ellis demanded.

From his safe the jeweller brought out a leather case, and looked at Ellis impressively before opening it.

"Pretty small," commented Ellis.

"Ah, but——" replied the other, and opened the case. "Look—Orsini's make!"

"I don't know anything about that," Ellis said as he poked the jewels with his finger. "Look strange to me. The fashion, however?"

"The very latest," Price assured him. "Trust me, Mr. Ellis."

It was one secret of Ellis's success that he knew where to trust. He had ventured twice that day, with women at that, and the thought of it was to trouble him before he slept. But he could trust Price in matters of taste, and as to secrecy, the man was bound to him. Price had been in politics at the time when Ellis was getting "influence" in the city government; for the jeweller those days were past, but this store and certain blocks of stock were the result. Besides, he was adroit. Ellis gave the chains and pendants a final push with his finger.

"Send it, then," he said. "The usual place. By the way, how much? Whew! some things come dear,

don't they? But send it, just the same, and at once. She's going out to some affair."

Thus it happened that Mrs. Harmon wore "the very latest" at her throat that night.

CHAPTER V

VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW

THE Blanchards' equipage was a perfect expression of quiet respectability, for the carriage was sober in colour, was drawn by a strong and glossy horse, and was driven by a coachman wearing a modest livery and a discontented countenance. As it drove away from the golf club the carriage held the three members of the family, in front the younger daughter, Beth, and on the rear seat the others: Judith erect and cheerful, the Colonel cheerful also, but lounging in his corner with the air of one who took the world without care. Blanchard was fifty-eight, military as to voice and hair, for his tones were sonorous and his white whiskers fierce. Yet these outward signs by no means indicated his nature, and his manner, though bluff, appertained less to military life than to the game of poker. Not that the Colonel played cards; moreover, he drank merely in moderation, swore simply to maintain his character, betrayed only by the tint of the left side of his mustache that he liked a good cigar, and was extravagant in neither dress nor table. He kept his carriage, of course, liked the best wines at home and at the club, and in a small way was a collector of curios. Yet the Blanchards, but for the brilliance of Judith, were quiet people; he was proud to be a quiet man.

Dullness is often the penalty of indolence; the Colonel was lazy and he had small wit. Perceiving that Judith came away from the tea stimulated and even excited,

he rallied her about her new acquaintance. "An interesting man, hey?" he asked for the third time.

"Yes," answered Judith absently. "Father, what is there against Mr. Ellis?"

"Only that he is a pusher. He jars." Blanchard aimed to be tolerant.

"Isn't there more?" asked little Beth.

The Colonel, as always, turned his eyes on her with pleasure. She was dark and quiet and sweet, yet her brown eyes revealed a power of examining questions for their moral aspects. "Nothing much," he said indulgently. "You don't know business, Beth. He's beaten his opponents always, and the beaten always squeal, but I doubt if he's as black as he's painted."

"I'm glad to hear you stand up for him, father," said Judith.

"He'll be looking for a wife among us," went on the Colonel with vast shrewdness and considerable delicacy. "How would he suit you, Judith?"

"Oh, father!" Beth protested. But Judith, with fire in her eyes, answered: "He's at least a man. You can't say that of every one."

Her answer made him turn toward her with a soberer thought and a new interest. His manner changed from the natural to the pompous as he set forth his views. "Money is almost the best thing one can have."

"Father, dear!" protested Beth again.

"I mean," he explained, again softening his manner, "from a father's standpoint. If I could see you two girls married with plenty of money, I could die happy." But evidently the Colonel was in the best of health, so that his words lacked impressiveness. It was one of the misfortunes of their family life that Judith was able to perceive the incongruity between her father's Delphic

utterances and his actual feelings, and that the Colonel knew she found him out.

"I wasn't thinking of Mr. Ellis's money," she said at this point.

"I was," retorted the Colonel. As he was struggling with a real thought, his tones became a little less sonorous and more genuine. "In sickness riches give everything. In health there are enough troubles without money cares. I mean it, Judith."

She took his hand and caressed it. "Forgive me, father!"

"My dear—my dear!" he responded cordially.

So this, the type of their little jars, the sole disturbers of family peace, passed as usual, rapidly and completely, and Ellis was spoken of no more. Beth, with customary adroitness, came in to shift the subject, and when the three descended at their door none of them shared the coachman's air of gloom.

He, however, detained the Colonel while the girls went up the steps. "Beg pardon, sir, but could you give me a little of my wages?"

"James," returned his master with his most military air, "why will you choose such inconvenient times? Here is all I have with me." He gave some money. "Twenty dollars."

"Yessir," replied the man, not overmuch relieved. "And the rest of it, sir? There's a hundred more owing."

"Not to-day," returned the Colonel with vexation. But he was an optimist. Though at the bottom of the steps he muttered to himself something about "discharge," by the time he reached the top he was absorbed in cheerful contemplation of the vast resources which, should Judith ever chance to marry Ellis, would be at her disposal.

Five minds were, that evening, dominated by the occurrences of the afternoon. One was the Colonel's, still entertaining a dream which should properly be repugnant to one of his station. This he recognised, but he reminded himself that as a parent his daughter's good should be his care. Another mind was Mather's, disturbed by the jealousy and dread which the manliest of lovers cannot master. And one was Mrs. Harmon's; she, like Ellis, had learned much that afternoon, and meant in future to apply her knowledge.

As that evening she went to the Fennos' ball Mrs. Harmon recalled the snubs of the afternoon, and saw how insecure her footing was among these people. Sometimes she had wondered if it were worth while, this struggle to be "in"; the life was dull, lacking all natural excitements; there was no friendship possible with any of the blue-bloods. Yet she hated to kuckle to them; if she could engineer this match between Judith and Ellis, then——! And Mrs. Harmon, with the hope of coming triumph, felt fully equal to meeting Mrs. Fenno on her own ground. Mrs. Harmon wore Ellis's jewels on her breast, she had his brain to back her, she believed she knew Judith's weaknesses, and she saw before her a bright future.

Judith Blanchard made at that ball a searching review of her world, dominated as she still was by the thoughts which Ellis aroused. For he, the strongest personality in the city, had done more than to excite her curiosity: with his deference to her opinion and his appeal for her help he had succeeded—as Mather never—in wakening her sympathy. Questioning why fashion should reject him, stirred to a new comparison of reality with sham, she looked keenly about her at the ball. She was in one of the inner sanctuaries, where society bowed down and worshiped itself. Judith sniffed the

incense, listened to the chants, and weighed the words of officiating priests and priestesses. She found everything to delight the eye, except the idols; everything to charm the senses, except sense.

In the ball-room there was dancing, pagan rites to what purpose? This usually unrhythmic swaying, skipping, sliding, seemed a profitless way to pass the hours when workers were in bed. Girls more or less innocent danced with men more or less *roue*; this procedure, indefinitely continued, gave occasion for jealousies among the girls and selfish scheming among the men. In other rooms the older people played cards, intent at bridge or whist upon their stakes. Near the buffet thronged bachelors old or young, with not a few married men, busied in acquiring an agreeable exhilaration. Their occupation was no worse than the passionate gambling of the old women. And the house in which all this went on was beautifully classic in design and furnishings. Beside that quiet elegance, how vacant was the chatter! As Judith thought thus, slowly the spirit of revolt came to her.

The master of the house approached her; he was leonine, massive, somewhat lame from rheumatism. She saw him, as he came, speaking among his guests; his smile was cynical. It lighted upon her father, and the Colonel, his character somehow exposed by that smile, seemed shallow. It turned to the men at the sideboard, and their interests seemed less than the froth in their glasses. The smile turned on Judith, and she felt called to give an account of herself.

But he merely asked her: "Where is Beth?"

"Gone with Miss Pease to a meeting of the Charity Board," Judith answered.

Mr. Fenno grunted, looking at her sidewise. "Better employed than we!"

Then he rambled away, neither knowing nor caring what encouragement he had given to her mood. He missed Beth, for his rheumatism was sharp, the company inane, and Beth was almost the only person who could make him contented with himself. But Judith felt the reflection of his cynicism and was stirred still deeper. What was there to interest her here?

Among all the women Mrs. Harmon alone was in disaccord. No dressmaker could conceal her natural style; the eye and carriage of the Judge's wife were bolder than those of the women about her. A free humour attracted some of the men; the women avoided her, the more delicate from instinct, the stronger with a frank dislike. This antipathy Judith had often felt and expressed, yet to-night she reviewed and rejected it. Mrs. Harmon belonged to the class of the rising Americans; in that class Judith felt interest, questioning if its vigour and freshness should not outweigh external faults. She went to Mrs. Harmon and began to talk with her.

She tried to find, within the exterior, the solid qualities of the middle class. But thought and purpose seemed lacking; in Mrs. Harmon the vulgarity lay deeper than the surface. She was frivolous; she liked the sparkle and the show, the wine, the dancing, and the gaiety. Promising herself an intimacy with Judith, she talked willingly, but it was only upon the subject of Ellis that she became interesting.

She told Judith much about him. He had always been persevering and ambitious; he had left his town as a boy because even then he found it too little. Ellis had begun small; now he was big. Some day, said Mrs Harmon significantly, people would recognise him.

Why not, thought Judith as she looked about her,

admit Ellis here? What was an aristocracy for but to reward success? How could it remain sound but by the infusion of new blood? Ellis had proved his quality by the things he had done; he had beaten Mather; yet these halls which to Mather were open were closed to Ellis. It was unfair to refuse to recognise him! What were the abilities of these men here, compared with his?

Thus Judith, tolerant in her broad Americanism, admiring the forces which to-day are accomplishing such marvellous results, thought of her world. At the same time Ellis also was thinking of it. His was the fifth mind moved by that afternoon's occurrence, but moved the most deeply of them all. On leaving Judith first, like a man smitten by a slender blade he had spoken, acted, thought as before. Then the inward bleeding began, and the pain. He had gone away from her thinking of her as something to be won, but no more distant, no less a commodity, than a public franchise or a seat in the legislature. Thus he had discussed her with Mrs. Harmon, but before night his thought of the girl had changed. Her refinement was new to him; he recalled her in imagination and dwelt on her features and her voice. Yet, equally with her delicacy, her spirit charmed him with its frankness and its admiration of great things. There was a subtle flattery in her interest in him; he had never thought of himself as she did; he saw himself magnified in her eyes, which seemed to refine the baseness from his employments and purposes. She gave him a new idea of himself, and held before him vague new aims.

He had entertained some of his henchmen that evening at his table, had tasted while they ate, sipped while they drank, listened while they spoke of politics. He sat at the head of the table, like the Sphinx after which

he was familiarly called, indifferent to their uncouthness and their little thoughts; then at the end he suddenly called them into executive session, asked a few keen questions, gave some brief directions, and dismissed them. Thus he had always ruled them, from outside, commanding respect by his decision, almost awe by his silence. Though his purposes were not clear, the men went to obey him, having learned to support him blindly, for he never failed. Such was Ellis among his subordinates, the "old man" of whom they never asked questions, with whom they never attempted familiarity. They praised him as they went, proud of their connection with him. But he put out the lights as soon as the men were gone, and sat at the window, looking at Fenno's house.

There was the temporary focus of social life; he saw the lights; had he opened his window he might have heard the music. Carriages drove up, people entered the house, and on the curtains of the ball-room he saw moving shadows. In that house were what he wanted—recognition, a new life, Judith. But she was guarded by the powers of a whole order, was infinitely remote.

His talk with Judith had doubled his determination to enter the upper world, and yet changed his regard for it. It became Judith's world, seeming to-night like a house which she inhabited, more precious by her presence. And because she was so much finer than he had imagined the women of her class, her sphere looked farther away, and his determination to enter it was tempered by the fear of failure.

As he took the first step in his new venture, he had been half ashamed of his desire to "better himself," quite unable to justify himself by appeal to the natural American wish to obtain the highest indorsement of his community. So long as there had been anything

left for him to win, he had turned instinctively toward it. Now he suddenly realised that he faced his greatest fight. He had often said that he liked fighting; he had struggled for many years with all the power of nerve and mind. To-night his brain seemed weary, bruised and scarred as a body might be. Watching the house where Judith was, contemplating her image, a softness came over Ellis, new to him; resolution became a wish, and then turned to yearning. It was with difficulty that he roused himself, surprise mingling with his contempt of the unrecognised sensation. He was in for it now, he told himself almost roughly; the game was worth the candle, and he would see it through.

CHAPTER VI

INTRODUCING AN ECCENTRIC

MR. PEVERIL PEASE had finished his week's work, and feeling no obligation to attend the golf club tea, went home and settled himself in his snugery among his books. When his feet were once in slippers, his velvet jacket was on, and he held a well-marked volume in his hand, he felt he had more true comfort than all the golf clubs in the world could give. So thorough was his satisfaction that rather than read he gave himself up to the enjoyment of his well-being. Gazing about the room, Mr. Pease permitted himself a brief retrospection of his career.

Few men in the town could with so much right compliment themselves. He had begun life with nothing but ancestral debts and encumbered property, and now he was nearly as rich as Ellis, who had started with the traditional dollar in his pocket. Pease's credit was firm as a rock; the stock of his bank was quoted—no, it was hoarded. The widow, the orphan, the struggling clerks who had their money in Pease's hands could sleep at ease, and the respect in which he was held by the business men of the city—but he wasn't thinking of that.

No, this little house was his thought, and this room, and that array of books. He had been thirteen years of age when his grandfather died, and within the month he had refused the trustees his permission to sell a foot of the real estate. Judge Harmon never tired of telling

of the visit of the boy, swelling with rage and resolution. "Cynthia may be willing, but grandfather never would sell, and I won't have it!" he had declared, and so strong was the lad's feeling that the trustees, divided in opinion, had yielded to him, backing the debts of the estate with their own credit. At eighteen he was practically their adviser and his own trustee; at twenty he had redeemed the homestead with his earnings; at twenty-five he had sold a single lot of the down-town property for what the entire estate would not have brought twelve years before. So much for determination and a long head.

Fifteen years more had passed, and still his life had not made him hard nor calculating. When he left his office he left his business; he went "home," to the house in which he was born. The little shingled building, so quaint, had been in the family for six generations; a Percival Pease founded it, a Pembroke Pease finished it, a Peveril Pease owned it now. It had never been rebuilt; the wainscot was still the same, the floors sagged, the stairs were queer, the ceilings low. It corresponded the least in the world with his riches and his great interests. But Pease had the heart of a boy and the affections of a woman. The house was his paradise, the room his bower, the books his especial delight. All his spare time he spent among them, giving himself to "mental improvement."

Many people thought him odd; some called him "poor Mr. Pease," with such pity as is given to the struggling artist or the ambitious novelist, for Pease had never been even to the high-school, and it seemed foolish for him to try to cultivate his mind. They did not consider that the grace of humility was not denied him, with just a touch of that saving quality, humour. He knew himself fairly well, he guarded himself suc-

cessfully, only one person really knew his heart, and for the opinion of the rest he had a smile. Let them laugh or pity, they had nothing so fine as he, they were not so happy as he, and his kind of a fool was not the worst.

And so we must acknowledge that he was thoroughly complacent. None of Judith Blanchard's discontent stirred him, none of Mather's anger at the world, and none of Ellis's desire to advance. This little room gave him all that he wanted: intellectual improvement, the feeling of progress, mental satisfaction. Pease went beyond cherishing an ideal of happiness; he believed that he was happy, and that no one could take his happiness from him.

And thinking so at this minute, his eye rested fondly on a motto on the wall.

It was from Goethe; it was lettered in old German characters, framed in passe-partout, and hung above the mantel. Pease had dug it out of "Faust"; it embodied so completely his notion of existence that he resolved to keep it before him always. No mere translation could do it justice; "Gray, dear friend, is all theory, and green the golden tree of life"—that was too tame. No; the sonorous German could best express it:

"Grau, theurer Freund, ist aller Theorie,
Und Gruen des Lebens goldner Baum."

Pease whispered the words to himself. Gray indeed were the lives of all others; he alone dwelt beneath life's green tree and ate its golden fruit. This house, this room, these books—ah, Paradise!

There came a knock at the door. "Peveril?"

"Yes, Cynthia."

"Don't forget, little Miss Blanchard is coming to dinner."

"No, Cynthia."

She was not requesting him to "dress." He always did. She was not asking him to be on time; he always was. Being on the safe side of the door, however, his cousin meant to remind him of her hardihood in inviting to his table some one young and pretty.

Not, Miss Cynthia sighed, that it would make any difference to him. When her visitor arrived a little early, and sat chatting in the parlour, Miss Pease reflected that Peveril, upstairs, was dressing no more carefully for this charming girl than he would have done for old Mrs. Brown. Charming—but he knew nothing of the real, the true, the living best!

Thus we may briefly record that Miss Cynthia Pease, who was the one person that understood her cousin, was not wholly in sympathy with his pursuits. Not that she would have acknowledged it to him, nor to anyone else, not even to "little Miss Blanchard," Judith's sister Beth, who was questioning her in a spirit of fun.

"I'm so afraid of dining with your cousin!" Beth exclaimed.

"No, you're not!" contradicted Miss Cynthia grimly.

"If I should make some slip in statement, or spot the table-cloth! He is so accurate, they all say."

"You may depend on him to be polite under all circumstances," responded Miss Cynthia, glaring.

"But I should know what he would think," persisted the young lady.

Miss Cynthia advanced to fury, scarcely repressed. "No, you wouldn't!" she denied emphatically. "I won't have you laugh at him."

"Why, you laugh at him yourself," said Beth. "You know you do."

"And if I do?" retorted Miss Pease. "Let me tell you he's the dearest, kindest man that ever——"

"Why, Miss Cynthia," cried the other, "don't I know?"

"Nobody knows," was the response.

Now all grades of opposition, from caustic irony to smothered denunciation, were habitual in Miss Pease's manner, but as she said "Nobody knows," lo! there were tears in her voice, if not in her eyes.

"Miss Cynthia!" cried Beth.

Miss Pease was gaunt and grewsome, so that her manner fitted her perfectly, but now as she sat winking her eyes and twisting her face she became pathetic. The girl rose quickly and came to her side.

"Have I hurt you?" she inquired anxiously.

"No, child, no," answered Miss Pease, recovering herself. "You didn't know what a sentimental old fool I am, did you? There, sit down again. You see," (she hesitated before committing herself further) "I was thinking, just before you came, of what Peveril has been to me. Your talk roused me again."

"He has done a great deal for you?" asked Beth with sympathy.

"Everything in the world!" answered Miss Cynthia warmly, not having resumed her manner. "Since our grandfather died Peveril has been my protector, though he is two years younger. You know we were very poor at first."

"Very poor?"

"We had nothing but debts," stated Miss Cynthia. "We lived in boarding-houses for seven years before Peveril could buy the homestead and get the strangers out of it. It was a proud day when he brought me here, and told me this was mine to live in until the end of my life. And yet for two years more I went daily to my work—I was in Benjamin's great dry-goods store, my dear—until when they asked me to be the head of

the linen department Peveril said I should work no more, and insisted on my staying at home."

"I never heard of that," cried Beth. "That you were ever in Benjamin's!"

"And a very good saleswoman I was," said Miss Cynthia. "But after that the money began to come in to us, and Peveril sold the land where the Security Building now is. I have not done a piece of work since then, except for Peveril or for charity. I am a rich woman, my dear."

"But you do so much for charity!" exclaimed Beth with enthusiasm.

When it came to praise, Miss Pease became grim at once. "I've got to keep busy with something," she snapped.

"But tell me more," begged Beth.

"There is nothing more," declared Miss Cynthia. "And now I hear him coming, five minutes before the hour, just as he always does. Don't be afraid of him; he has the softest heart in the world, as you ought to discover, since you had the skill to find mine."

Beth had only the time to squeeze her friend's hand as the two stood up together. She had discovered Miss Pease's heart; it was an unconscious specialty of Beth's to find the weak points in the armour of forbidding persons, and she had on her list of friends more of the lonely and unknown than had many a worker in organised charity. She was, in fact, a worker in her own special field, the well-to-do, bringing them the sympathy and affection which they needed as much as do the poor. She had neither shrewdness nor experience; what she did was quite unconscious, but her value was unique. Mr. William Fenno, who had no love for his wife's pleasures and whose daughters took after their mother, loved to have the girl with him. Judge Harmon, not

quite at home by his own gas-log, felt more comfortable if Beth were spending the evening with him—for she made no pretense of coming to see his wife. Quite unconsciously, a similar bond had been growing up between Beth and Miss Pease, and took open recognition on that day when Miss Cynthia, allowing her eyes to be pleased by the girl's freshness, blurted her feeling and said: "I like you. You are so unlike your sister."

But now Mr. Pease entered the room, and stood bowing while his cousin repeated the formula: "Peveril, here is Miss Elizabeth Blanchard. Beth, you remember my cousin, Mr. Peveril Pease?"

Beth thought he was "funny," meaning he was peculiar. He was short and rotund, he was immaculate and formal. His eyes met hers soberly, as if he had little of his cousin's wit, however much less savage. Talk opened with the golf club tea, and before the subject was exhausted he led the conversation dexterously to the weather. Dinner was announced while the beauty of the spring was yet under discussion, and at table, for a while, Beth was still repeating to herself that he was a "funny" little man.

Curiously, Pease was in an entirely new situation. Never had he been so placed that he must give an hour's undivided attention to a girl. He had never learned that girls have individuality; he avoided them as a rule, and at dinners there was always one at his left hand to relieve the other at his right, so that he never spoke to either of them long. Besides, not being regarded as a marrying man, Pease was invariably given the "sticks" to entertain. Girls had been to him, therefore, undeveloped creatures, displaying similar characteristics, being usually unacquainted with serious topics, and (quite as usually) devoid of personal attractions. Beth Blanchard, however, was something different. Without

dwelling on her charms, it is enough to say that she was pretty; and without entering upon her mental acquirements, let us believe that she knew what was going on. She was quite used, moreover, to the society of older persons, and could meet Pease on many grounds, although it happened that the subject chosen was Europe.

"You have been there?" asked Pease quickly when Germany was mentioned.

"We spent some time there," Beth replied.

"Of course you have seen Weimar, then," Pease assumed. He happened to be right.

"Oh, yes," she answered, quite as if Weimar were still a focus of travel. "We spent a month there; mamma was quite ill. You know"—and here she addressed Miss Cynthia—"that she died over there, and then we came home."

Mr. Pease, in conjunction with his cousin, murmured his condolences, and Miss Blanchard, not to make the evening doleful, turned again to speak of Weimar.

"We lived quite near to Goethe's house," she said.

Then she beheld Mr. Pease glow with admiration. "You are very fortunate," he cried. "The inspiration must have been great."

"I am no writer, Mr. Pease," returned Beth.

"But," he explained, "it must have permanently bettered and improved you"

"Do you think I needed it?" she flashed.

Miss Cynthia, at her end of the table, was biting her lip. Pease, not perceiving that he was being rallied, fell to apologising. "Oh, no," he gasped. "I meant——"

She spared him. "I was not serious," she laughed. "You must pardon me." It was no new matter with

her to relieve the embarrassed. Then she led him once more to the topic.

"You like Weimar, Mr. Pease?"

"Oh, I only like Goethe, you know, and Schiller. I've never been from America."

"And yet you read German?"

"Not very well. You see, I——"

And then he spoke of himself. Miss Cynthia sat amazed. Here was Peveril, who was always silent regarding his hobby, speaking from his heart. Beth coaxed a little; he hung back a bit, but he yielded. It was as if a miser were giving up his gold, yet the gold came. For all that she had invited Beth there, wishing to stir her cousin from his rut, Miss Cynthia presently became enraged. Peveril was telling more than he had ever told her. This chit of a girl, what charm had she?

But Pease himself, as he told the unaccustomed tale in halting sentences, felt comfort. It had been a long time repressed within him; he had seldom touched on it with Cynthia, and though he had not known it, the loneliness of it had been wearing on him all these years. It was sympathy that now brought it out, that quality in Beth which could pierce the armour of such a cynic as Miss Cynthia, or warm so cold a heart as William Fenno's. Pease yielded to it as frost to the sun. So he told of himself and his studies, and the impulse of all these years he confessed at the last.

"You see," he said, flushing painfully, "it's poetry that I love."

And he sat, the man of business, with his fair skin pink as a girl's. Then, lest she should mistake, he explained.

"You mustn't think," he said eagerly, "that I really suppose I understand. I know I lose much—I—I'm not very deep, you know. There are so many subtle things and such beautiful ones that pass me by. Only,

you see [more hesitation], I got such pleasure from the English poets that I—tried the German. With a dictionary, you know, and a grammar. And all this is so much to me that I—I don't care for anything else. Can you understand?"

Then he was swept by doubt and fear. Would she laugh? Not she! Beth made him understand she appreciated his feelings, and presently Miss Cynthia found herself listening to a discussion of Shakespeare. Her lip curled—how foolish of Peveril! What real interest could Beth take in his ideas?

He asked himself the same question, with a sudden start, for Beth laughed merrily. What had he said that was laughable? She held up a finger. "Mr. Pease, I am going to accuse you of something. Will you promise to tell me the truth?"

This, he dimly felt, was a species of banter. "I promise," he said uncomfortably.

"Then, sir, do you memorise?"

"Why, yes," he confessed.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed. "Miss Cynthia, are you not ashamed of him? I know nobody that memorises now, Mr. Pease, except you and—me!"

He was relieved, and they fell to speaking eagerly. For the next few minutes Miss Cynthia felt the outrage of hearing poetry quoted at her table. Wordsworth, Scott, Burns, and then—for Pease was truly patriotic—Lanier and Longfellow. And so they came to discuss the meaning of a passage, and took up the subject of "Life." Next, "Happiness." At all this sentiment Miss Cynthia ground her teeth.

Beth was of the opinion that environment makes happiness. Pease maintained that we make our own environment. "Impossible!" said Beth, thinking of Mr. Fenno and the Judge.

"Easily done!" declared Pease, thinking of himself.

Then they spoke of "Ideals of Conduct"—Which of them make most for Happiness? By little and little they came to the point where Pease felt impelled to open his breast again. He spoke of his motto, quoting it clumsily with his self-taught accent, so that a smile almost came to her lips. She drew from him that he believed he knew the gray of life, and the green.

"But, Mr. Pease," Beth objected, "how can you say you know so much of life when you live so much alone?"

"We are late—we are late!" cried Miss Cynthia suddenly. "We shall miss our engagement if we sit so long here."

And so the two ladies presently went away, refusing all escort. Standing at the open door, Pease watched them with a strange regret. The thought of returning to his books was astonishingly unwelcome; they seemed to be but leather, ink, and paper. He looked up at the heavens. Something was stinging in his veins: what a lovely world! For the first time he recognised the beauty of the moon.

His thoughts were interrupted by a footstep, and there stood Mather. "Mr. Pease," said he, "this is an unusual hour for business. But the kind offer which you made me to-day——" He hesitated.

"The position had only possibilities," answered Pease. "You would be your own master, because I should leave everything to you, but it would be like beginning at the bottom again. I knew you would refuse me."

"You mistake," returned Mather with energy. "I like the chance, and will build up your venture for you. I am ready to take your instructions to-night, and go to work Monday morning."

"Come inside," said Mr. Pease.

CHAPTER VII

CHEBASSET

At the conference between Mather and Pease various matters were discussed which are not to the direct purpose of this story. Such were, for instance, the electrical and mechanical devices by which a metal was to be produced from its ore, either in sheets, pure, or plated on iron. Pease had bought the patent; the plan commended itself to Mather immediately; there was "good money" in it. But before anything else could be done a plant must be secured, a work which Pease expected would take much time. He watched to see how Mather would propose to go about it.

"We must have a good water-supply for the vats," mused Mather. "A harbour-front will be needed for the coal and ore; that means a suburban location, which calls again for railroad facilities."

"Of course there is no mill ready-made?"

"There is! The old Dye Company's plant at Chebasset."

"Impossible!" answered Pease at once.

"Because rich people have summer places thereabouts, and wouldn't like a mill as neighbour?"

"Those rich people are our friends," reminded Pease.

"Mr. Pease," said Mather positively, "I know all the mills of this neighbourhood. There is no other suitable. To use this plant will save us a year's time, as well as great expense. The buildings are in good condition; the vats are large. The harbour is deep; all we need is

to enlarge the wharf and put in new engines. What more could one ask?"

"Nothing," admitted Pease.

"Then why not buy? Colonel Blanchard has been trying to sell these ten years; he lost much money there. The price is so low that Fenno or Branderson could easily have protected themselves."

Pease still hesitated.

"One thing more," said Mather. "I have visited in Chebasset, for short periods; I know the place fairly well. The mill is in the remotest corner of the town, and the dirtiest; there are poor houses there, wretched sanitation, and a saloon on mill property. It's a good place gone to seed. I'd like to clean it out."

Mr. Pease thought he saw a way. "Let this settle it. If the Colonel is willing to sell, there will be no reason why we should not buy."

"I may go ahead on that understanding?"

"You may."

Mather rose. "The Colonel will be willing to sell. If you put this in my hands, and will not appear, I can get the place cheap. People are ready to see me start on another fool's errand at any time."

"Go ahead, then; you know how much I am willing to spend. Attend to everything and spare me the details. But," added Pease kindly, "I am sorry to see you quite so bitter. Your friends will yet put you back in Ellis's place."

"When he has a clear majority of fifty votes in our small issue of stock? Ah, let me go my own way, Mr. Pease. I see here a chance to do a good thing; I need a wrestle with business. After I have been a month at this you will find me a different man."

They parted, each with a little envy of the other. Mather envied Pease his accomplishments, the work

that stood in his name; Pease coveted the other's youth. But each was glad that they were working together. Pease found that the purchase was accomplished within a fortnight, and that men were soon at work on alterations in the mills. Those were matters in which he did not concern himself; the scheme was bound to succeed; he had little money in it (as money went with him), and he was interested to see what Mather would make of the business. Trouble in the form of criticism was bound to come.

When it came the ladies took an active hand in it. Mrs. Fenno complained that the sky-line of her view would be broken by the new chimney; Mrs. Branderson had no relish for the aspect of the projected coal-wharf. Young people believed that the river would be spoiled for canoeing, and all agreed that the village would be no longer bearable, with the families of fifty imported workmen to make it noisy and dirty. Moreover, if the villagers themselves should give up their old occupations of fishing, clam-digging, and market-gardening, for the steadier work in the mill, then where would the cottagers look for their lobsters, their stews, and their fresh vegetables? But the plan was put through. The chimney went up, the wharf was enlarged, coal and ore barges appeared in the little harbour, and in a surprisingly short time the old Dye Company's mill was ready for work. Pease saw his returns promised a year before he had expected, but George Mather was no longer popular. Mrs. Fenno frowned at him, Mrs. Branderson scolded, and though their husbands laughed at the young man and said he had been clever, many people clamoured, and among them Judith Blanchard.

This move of Mather's had taken her by surprise; at a step he had gained a new position. No offers from the rich men moved him to sell; he replied that he meant

to carry out his plans. So a whole section of the town was put in order for the families of the new workmen. Judith, hearing of all this, complained to Mather when she met him.

"And yet," he responded, "the mill is a mile from the nearest estate; the whole town lies between. As for what clearing up I've done, I value picturesqueness, Judith, but the place is now ten times healthier. And we are putting in smoke-consumers."

"Yet from most of our houses we can see your chimney."

"Judith, for that one eyesore which I put up I will remove ten from the town."

"But who asked you to do it? You never lived here; you have no love for the place."

"I have lived," he replied, "in other New England towns, equally degenerate."

"I am not speaking of the townspeople," she said. "I mean the summer residents."

"Wasn't it your father's matter to think of them?"

Judith had felt the discussion to be going against her. Therefore she answered with some warmth: "That is another question entirely!"

"I beg your pardon, Judith," he said. "But mayn't I describe my plans?"

"No," she answered; "I don't think it is necessary."

"Very well," he returned, and made no attempt to say more. Hurt, he fell into a mood of dogged endurance. "Very well," he repeated, and let the matter drop. Then Judith's interest was roused too late; he might really have had something to say. She knew that dirt was unhealthy; she remembered that in Chebasset drunkards on the street were more plentiful than in Stirling. Yet her generosity did not quite extend to recalling her words—partly because of natural pride,

partly because she knew his interest in her and would not encourage it, partly again because she still resented his words to Ellis in her presence. And so the breach between them remained.

Yet he had already impressed her, by his manly readiness to begin life again, and by his steadiness under her fire. Confidence was, to Judith, almost a virtue. And the idea of reform always appealed to her: had the place been really so bad?

One by one the households had been moving down to Chebasset, and Beth had already opened the Blanchard cottage. On the evening after Judith had spoken with Mather she asked if Beth had noticed the changes in Chebasset.

"George's? At his mill?" asked Beth. "I think it's much improved. Those horrid tumble-down shanties are gone, and there are new houses there now—shingled and stained they are to be—with new fences."

"Father," asked Judith, "why didn't you do that?"

"My dear child," was his response, "how could I afford it?" The Colonel was always nervous when the subject of the new mill was broached, and quitted it as soon as possible. But Judith pursued him.

"I asked George if he had not treated us unfairly—the property owners, I mean. He seemed to think that was your affair."

Beth was up in arms at once. "For that chimney? He laid the blame on papa?"

The Colonel wiped his flowing mustache, and looked at Judith; Beth's outraged cry did not interest him so much as his elder daughter's stand. "What did you say to him?" he asked.

"I said that was another question."

"So it is," agreed the Colonel. "Entirely different." He looked at Beth to see if she were satisfied; she rose

and came behind his chair, where she began smoothing his hair.

"Poor papa," she purred.

Blanchard swelled his chest. "Thank you, Beth," he said, but his thoughts went back to Judith. People took different stands on this matter; he was anxious to have Judith on his side. Fenno had told the Colonel that he, Fenno, ought to have been informed of the proposed sale; Branderson, less bluntly, had intimated the same. It was possible that Judith might take a similar view.

"I had others beside myself to consider," he said.

"Dear papa!" murmured Beth. But Judith took it differently.

"I don't want to profit by the sale," she stated.

The Colonel offered no explanation. At the time of the sale he had not been thinking of his daughters, but of certain pressing creditors. So the money had been welcome and was already partly gone. He answered with grim knowledge of a hidden meaning.

"I'll take care you shall not profit by the transaction, Judith. But I am sorry that the mill is sold. I hate a disturbance."

"Don't you be sorry, papa!" exhorted Beth. But Judith delivered a shot which hit her parent between wind and water. It was one of those impromptus which come too quickly to be checked.

"Perhaps Mr. Fenno would have given more."

"Judith!" shouted her father, bouncing in his chair.

"I beg your pardon, papa," she said humbly.

When Judith was humble she was charming; the Colonel accepted her kiss and pardoned her. As for herself, she felt her spirit lightened, as by an electric discharge, and began to look at the whole question of Mather's mill more temperately. Why should she

grudge him his success? It was so much less than Ellis's. When next she met Mather she was gracious to him, and was ready to hear a full account of all his plans, if only he would open the subject. He avoided it.

Then the Blanchards moved to Chebasset, and Judith saw the mill and chimney with her own eyes. People had stopped scolding about them; she found them not so bad as had been reported, and the chimney, though certainly tall, gave off but the slightest film of smoke. So thorough were Mather's improvements that they forced Judith's admiration. When she first went to the grocer's and, after making her purchases, inquired of the changes in the town, she heard a torrent of praise of Mather.

"It's a bad place he's cleaned out," the grocer said, coming very close and speaking confidentially. "Many young fellows were led wrong there, but the biggest saloon's gone now, and some of the worst men have left the town, and a man can feel that his own children have a chance of growing up decent. It's two boys I have, Miss Blanchard, that I was worrying about till Mr. Mather came."

"I am glad things are so much better," Judith said.

"They'll be better yet," the grocer responded. "Gross, the other saloon-keeper, has got to look after himself now. Mr. Mather had him in court only the other day—look, there they are now."

On the sidewalk outside stood a large man, gross as was his name; across the street Mather was unconcernedly walking. The saloon-keeper raised a fist and shouted at Mather, who paused and looked over at him inquiringly.

"I'll be even with you!" shouted Gross again.

"Wait a bit," answered Mather cheerfully, "I'll come

over." He crossed the street and stepped directly to the saloon-keeper. "You'll be even with me for what, Mr. Gross?"

"For that fine," answered the other. "I'll have you in court yet, see if I don't."

"You'll have me in court," rejoined Mather, "when you catch me selling whisky to minors, not before, Mr. Gross. And while we're on this subject I may as well say that I've just sworn out a second warrant against you."

The saloon-keeper backed away from the very cool young man. "What yer goin' ter do?" he asked.

"I'm going to see," Mather answered, "that you observe the liquor laws. And when your license comes before the selectmen for renewal, I shall be at the hearing."

On Gross's face appeared blotches of white. "We'll see!" he blustered.

"We'll see," agreed Mather, and turned away.

The grocer spoke in Judith's ear. "That's the stuff! That's what, Miss Blanchard!" Waiting till Mather was gone, Judith left the shop and went home very thoughtful. So George was working, on however small a scale, for reform and progress. She could not fail to see that for his coming the whole town had a brisker, brighter look. Chebasset streets had been dull, sleepy, unpainted. Now fences were repaired, houses were freshened, and the townspeople looked better dressed, because the men were earning more money at the mill, or the women were gaining livings by boarding and lodging the new-comers. The town was changed, and Mather was the cause.

Then she learned more of him. He was domesticating himself there, kept a cat-boat, and had even bought a

cottage. Beth pointed out the little house, a good example of provincial architecture.

"You didn't tell us you were going to buy," Judith reproached him when he came to call.

"Oh," he answered indirectly, "I fell in love with the place, and the family mahogany fits in there exactly. Did you notice my roses?"

Then he spoke of gardening, and gave Judith no chance to tell him what she thought about his work. Had he done so, she might even have let him know that she had overheard his talk with Gross, and that his action pleased her. But he avoided the subject; his call was brief, and after he had gone he did not return for a number of days. Chebasset was not lively that summer; Judith grew lonesome, and more than once thought of Mather. His conduct piqued and puzzled her. Now was his chance, as he ought to know. What had become of the lover who used to bring to her his hopes and fears?

As for that lover, he had less time at his disposal than Judith supposed. All day he was at the mill, or else went to Stirling on necessary business; at night he was very tired. Yet though he knew he was leaving Judith to her own devices, he did it deliberately. Until she was tired of freedom, until she had satisfied her interest in the great world, she would come to no man's call. Perhaps his conclusion was wise, perhaps it was not, for while at a distance he watched Judith and weighed his chances, Ellis was doing the same.

To the outsider, Mather's path seemed clear; he lived in the same town with Judith, might see her every day, and, worst of all, was prospering. "I'll touch him up," said Ellis grimly to himself. "He'll buy a house, will he?" And from that time he kept well informed of Mather's business acts, watching for a chance to trip

him. Ellis knew all the ways of those three great forces: politics, capital, and labour; he could pull so many wires that he counted on acting unobserved.

Minor annoyances met Mather in his business, traceable to no particular source. There was evident discrimination in railroad rates, and yet so small was the increase that proof was difficult. Freight was mislaid and mishandled; it was frequently very vexing. But the real attempt to cripple the new business came toward the middle of the summer, when Ellis, weary of the weak attempts of his subordinates at annoyance, took a hand himself, and looked for some vital flaw in the safeguards of the Electrolytic Company. He believed he found it, and various legal notices came to Mather, all of which remained unanswered. Finally an important official came in person to the office. He introduced himself as Mr. Daggett of the harbour commission.

"I have written you several times," he complained.

"So you have," answered Mather. "Miss Jenks, may Mr. Daggett and I have the office to ourselves for a while? I take it," he added, when the door closed behind the stenographer, "that we are going to be rude to each other. Have a cigar?"

"Thanks," said Daggett, "but I don't see why ye didn't answer."

"I was too busy. Besides, I wanted to get you down here, so as to settle the matter once for all. Will you state the matter plainly; your letters were vague? That is the wharf out there."

Mr. Daggett viewed it through the window. "Yes, it's surely a long wharf. Twenty feet beyond the harbour line. Ye'll have to take it down."

"Or else?" demanded Mather.

"Show a permit."

"Come, there's one other choice."

"Pay a fine," grinned Daggett. "We've set a pretty large sum. The board's irritated, ye see, because ye've paid so little attention to us."

"The board never fails to answer letters, does it?" inquired Mather.

"What do you mean?"

"You're too busy, I suppose. And you don't appear to remember seeing me before, Mr. Daggett."

"Have I?" asked the commissioner.

"You don't recollect that I wrote about this matter two months ago? I had to go to the office to get an answer. You were deep in affairs, Mr. Daggett. I found you and two others playing cards."

"Was I?" asked Daggett.

"When was this harbour line established, anyway? Wasn't it about two weeks ago?"

"Certainly," Mr. Daggett answered. "That has nothing to do with it. But what did we tell you at the office—I can't remember your coming."

"I wasn't there long enough to make much impression," said Mather. "One of your friends told me that all fools knew there was no harbour line here, and I didn't need your permission."

"Hm!" remarked Daggett doubtfully. Then he brightened. "Did we give you that in writing?"

"I didn't ask you for it. You seemed so anxious to go on with your game that I didn't trouble you further."

"Then you have no permission," stated Daggett. "And now that there is a harbour line, what will you do about it?"

"I learned all I wanted of you," said Mather. He had not yet risen from his desk, but now he did so, and going over to his safe, he threw it open. "I asked nothing further because, there being no harbour line, a

permit wouldn't have been worth the paper it was written on. I wrote to the Secretary of the Navy." Mather drew a document from a drawer of the safe. "Do you care to see his answer?"

"Whew!" whistled Daggett. "Well, I suppose I might as well."

Mather gave him the paper. "You will see that I have permission to build ten feet farther if I want to, and fifteen broader. I may also build another wharf if I wish, lower down. Are you satisfied?" He touched the bell. "You may come in now, Miss Jenks. Thank you for taking it so easily, Mr. Daggett. I won't keep you from your game any longer. Good-day."

—"And before I left the office he was hard at work again, Mr. Ellis," reported Daggett. "Save me, but he's taken pretty good care of himself, and that's a fact."

Ellis had no comments to make; he did his growling to himself. Seeing nothing further to do, he left Mather alone.

Thus time passed by till that midsummer day when Ellis took the trolley to Chebasset and, once there, strolled among its streets. He viewed the mill from a distance and gritted his teeth at the sight. Mather was well ensconced; it seemed altogether too likely that he might win a wife, among his other successes. Then the promoter left the town and climbed above it on the winding road, viewing the estates of the summer residents as one by one he passed their gates. Should he enter at the Judge's?

A light step sounded on the road as he hesitated at the gate. Someone spoke his name, and there stood Judith Blanchard.

"Here, and in business hours?" she asked.

"My day's work was done," he answered. "Besides, it was not all pleasure that brought me."

Judith's eyes brightened. "Tell me," she suggested.

"Why should I tell you?" he asked bluntly. But the brusqueness only pleased her; he was a man of secrets.

"No reason at all," she answered.

"And yet," he said, "your advice would be valuable, if you will not tell."

"I! I tell?" she asked. "You do not know me."

"Then," he said, "I came to look at land here."

"To look at land here?" she repeated, questioning. "Can you buy here?"

"There is land," he said. "The price would be doubled if it were known I am after it. I have the refusal of it, through agents."

"Where does it lie?" she asked.

"Farther up the road."

"You must not be seen going to it," she declared. "People would take alarm——" She stopped, embarrassed.

"I do not mind," he said, and yet she felt his bitterness. "I am not considered a good neighbour."

"It is wrong of people," she declared earnestly.

"I should not be welcome on any one of these piazzas," he said, indicating the villas beyond them. "The Judge doesn't like me—your own father has no use for me."

"Will you come and try?" she cried. "I should like to see if my father will be rude to my guest."

"You are very kind," he said, "but do you consider——?"

"I have invited you," she interrupted. "Will you come?"

"With pleasure," he answered. They went up the hill together.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROGRESS OF ACQUAINTANCE

JUDITH, before she met Ellis for this second time, had been bored. Chebasset was so dull that it was dreary; in the country-houses were given little teas, slow whist-parties, or stupid luncheons. Of the young people of her age some had married, others had gone into business, and the self-content of the first of these was not to be disturbed, nor the fatigue of the others to be increased, for the sake of giving Judith a good time. She became a little impatient with her surroundings, therefore, and as the sizzling summer brought physical discomfort, she was inclined to lay the blame where it could scarcely with justice be said to belong. Yet while her acquaintances were not responsible for the heat, Judith, with her abundant energies unused, was right in feeling that society was sunk in sloth, and that instead of giving itself to petty diversions it had better do something worth while. She was discontented with herself, her idleness, her uselessness; she felt that she would rather face even the heat of the city, and be doing, than stay longer on her piazza and keep cool. Therefore she had sought the dusty road as a sort of penance, and meeting Ellis, had been reminded of what he stood for: the world of working men and women.

She had thought of him many times since their first meeting, making his achievements a standard to which only Pease and Fenno approximated, and of which Mather fell far short. She had continued to read of

Ellis in the newspapers, to watch his slow course of uninterrupted success, and had come to accept the popular idea of his irresistible genius. Feeling this natural admiration of his immense energy and skill, in her heart she made little of the two obstacles which were said to lie in his path. For it was claimed, first, that some day the street-railway would prove too much for him, bringing him as it did in contact with the organised mass of labourers, and with the public which Mather had accustomed to an excellent standard of service. Could Ellis always maintain the present delicate balance between dividends, wages, and efficiency? Again it was said that some day he would come in conflict with Judith's own class, which, when it chose to exert its power, would rise and hurl him down. Judith put no belief in either of these prophecies, considering Ellis able to avoid all difficulties, her caste too flabby to oppose him. So she thought of him as destined always to conquer; he would win his way even among the elect, and might become a friend of hers. For she could help him; they were alike in their loneliness, and their outlook upon life was the same. Therefore when she met him she welcomed him.

A fillip to the wheel of her fate was given as she and Ellis went up the hill. They met Miss Fenno coming down. Now Miss Fenno was the extreme type of the society-bred person, knowing nothing but the one thing. Her interests were so small that they included less than the proverbial four-hundred people; her prejudices were so large that they formed a sort of Chinese wall to exclude any real humanity of soul. And all she did at this juncture was to gaze very superciliously at Ellis, and then to give the coldest of nods to Judith as she passed.

"The Fenno manner," grumbled Ellis to himself,

But Judith flamed with resentment. She brought Ellis up to her own piazza, a few minutes later, with that in her bearing which her father recognised as her panoply of war: quietness, erectness, something of hauteur. The Colonel rose hastily.

"I have brought Mr. Ellis," she said.

"Glad to see him!" exclaimed the Colonel as if he had been spurred. "Mr. Ellis is a stranger in Chebasset."

Ellis had the wisdom to attempt no manner. "I come here seldom," he responded. "You are very kind to welcome me, Colonel."

He wondered if the use of the title were proper in the upper circle, and if he should have answered differently. Moments such as this made the game seem scarcely worth the candle; the nerve and fiber used up were more than a day of business would require. But his qualities asserted themselves. Here he was where he most wanted to be; he meant to win the right to come again.

"What do you think of our view?" the Colonel asked, leading his guest to the edge of the piazza. The hill fell away steeply, the town lay below, and scattered on the farther hillsides were the villas of the well-to-do. The Colonel began pointing out the residences. "Alfred Fenno over there—Alfred, not William, you know; richer than his brother, but not so prominent. And down there is Branderson; he overlooks the river, but he also sees the new chimney, which we miss." The Colonel added, "A good deal of money he has spent there."

"I should think so," agreed Ellis.

"The Dents are over there," Blanchard proceeded. "Rather pretentious the house is, in my opinion, like—" his voice faded away; he had had in mind Ellis's own house in the city. "—Er, gingerbready, don't you think?"

"The elms don't let me see it very well," Ellis was glad to answer. For what was gingerbread? Sticky?

"But much money in it," said the Colonel. "Dent has made a good thing of his mills."

"Very good thing," murmured Ellis. He was interested to hear these comments of an insider.

"Kingston's place is over there," continued the Colonel. "Now, I like, do you know, Mr. Ellis, what Kingston has done with that house. Small, but a gem, sir—a gem! Money has not been spared—and there's lots of money there!" quoth the Colonel, wagging his head.

Ellis began to perceive the monotony of these descriptions. Money, riches; riches, money. And there was an unction to each utterance which might betray the inner man. Judith perceived this also.

"Let us have tea," she said, and going where the tea-table stood, she rang for the maid. But the Colonel continued:

"And William Fenno is over there—a fine house, Mr. Ellis; pure Georgian, a hundred years old if it's a day. A very old family, and a very old family fortune. The West India trade did it, before our shipping declined."

"Long ago," murmured Ellis. He knew very little of those old days. The present and the immediate future concerned him, and as for the causes of industrial changes, he was one himself.

"Come," insisted Judith, "come and sit down, and let us leave off talking of people's possessions."

"Judith! My dear!" remonstrated the Colonel. But the maid was bringing out the steaming kettle, and he took his seat by the table. "My daughter," he said to Ellis, half playfully, "does not concern herself with things which you and I must consider."

Judith raised her eyebrows. "Do you take sugar, Mr. Ellis?" she asked.

"Sugar, if you please," he answered. He was divided in his interest as he sat there, for he had taken from the chair, and now held in his hand, the newspaper which the Colonel had been reading as they arrived. Ellis saw pencillings beside the stock-exchange reports, but though he wished to read them he did not dare, and so laid the paper aside to watch Judith make the tea. This was new to him. Mrs. Harmon had never taken the trouble to offer him tea, though the gaudy outfit stood always in her parlour. He knew that the "proper thing" was his at last, in this detail, but how to take the cup, how hold it, drink from it? Confound the schoolboy feeling!

"It was hot in the city to-day?" asked the Colonel.

"Uncomfortable," answered Ellis. "You are fortunate, Miss Blanchard, not to have to go to the city every day, as some girls do."

"I'm not so sure," she responded. "It's dull here, doing nothing. I sometimes wish I were a stenographer."

"Judith!" exclaimed her father.

"To earn your own living?" asked Ellis.

"I should not be afraid to try," she replied.

"You'd make a good stenographer, I do believe," he exclaimed.

"Thank you," she answered.

His enthusiasm mounted. "I have a situation open!" he cried.

"You wouldn't find her spelling perfect," commented the Colonel grimly. He laughed with immense enjoyment at his joke, and at the moment Beth Blanchard came out of the house and joined them.

Ellis did not see her at first; he was watching the Colonel, and divined that no great barrier separated

him from the aristocrat; there had been in Blanchard's manner nothing that expressed repulsion—nothing like Fenno's coolness, for instance, or the constant scrutiny which was so uncomfortable. Blanchard had seemed willing to fill up his idle hours by speech with any one; he was a new specimen, therefore, and Ellis was studying him, when of a sudden he heard Judith speak his name, and looked up to meet the gaze of a pair of quiet eyes. With a little start he scrambled to his feet.

"My sister," Judith was saying.

He bowed and endeavoured to speak, but he felt that the beginning was wrong. Beth was in turn dissecting him; she was something entirely different from Judith, more thoughtful, less headstrong. The idea that here was an adverse influence came into his mind, as he stammered that he was pleased to meet her.

"Thank you, Mr. Ellis," she answered. Judith noticed that Beth on her part expressed no pleasure. The little sister had individuality, with a persistence in her own opinion which sometimes contrasted strongly with her usual softness. But the incident was brief. for Beth's eye lighted as she saw a visitor at the corner of the piazza, hesitating with hat in hand.

"Mr. Pease!" she exclaimed.

The little conventionalities of this new welcome also passed. Mr. Pease had met Mr. Ellis; he was delighted to find the family at home; the others were equally pleased that he had come. But when the pause came it was awkward, for Judith and Ellis were clearly uncongenial with Beth and Pease; it required the Colonel's intervention to prevent a hopeless attempt at general conversation. He drew Ellis away; Judith followed, and Beth sat down to serve Pease with tea.

Then the Colonel himself withdrew, on pretext of the

need to catch the mail. He went into the library to write, and Judith turned to Ellis.

"Can we go from here to see the land you spoke of?"

"The old Welton place," he said. "Do you know the way?"

"Certainly," answered Judith. They excused themselves to the others.

As they prepared to go, the Colonel looked at them from his desk; then turned his eyes on Beth and Pease. A thrill of wonder, then a sense of exultation seized him. Attractive girls they both were, and the men were the two richest in the city.

Judith conducted Ellis through shrubbery and across fields, up the hillside to a spot where little trees were growing in an old cellar, while charred timbers lying half buried spoke of the catastrophe which had destroyed the house. "I remember the fire," Judith said. "I was a child then, but I stood at the window in the night, mother holding me, and watched the house burn down. Mr. Welton would neither build again nor sell. But the place is on the market now?"

"He's to marry again, I understand," answered Ellis. They both accepted the fact as explaining any and all departures from previous lines of conduct.

"Would you build on this spot?" she asked him.

"What would you advise?" he returned. She swept the situation with her gaze.

"There are sites higher up, or lower down," she said. "Lower is too low. Higher—you might see the chimney."

Ellis noted with satisfaction the prejudice against Mather's landmark, but he passed the remark by. "Don't you like," he said, "a house placed at the highest possible point? It is so striking."

"Couldn't it be too much so?" she inquired.

He turned his sharp look on her, willing to take a lesson and at the same time make it evident that he welcomed the instruction. "That is a new idea," he said. "It explains why that chimney, for instance, is unpleasant."

"It is so tall and—stupid," explained Judith; "and you never can get rid of it."

"I understand," he said. "Then perhaps this is the best place to build. I could get it roofed in before winter, easily, and have the whole thing ready by next summer. Stables where the barn stands, I suppose. My architect could get out the plans in a fortnight."

"The same architect," queried Judith, "that built your city house?" There was that in her voice which seized Ellis's attention.

"You don't like his work?" he demanded.

"Why," she hesitated, caught, "I—you wouldn't put a city house here, would you?"

"I like the kind," he said. "Stone, you know; turrets, carvings, imps, and that sort of thing. All hand-work, but they get them out quickly. Kind of a tall house. Wouldn't that do here?"

"No, no, Mr. Ellis," she answered quickly, almost shuddering at his description. "Think how out of place—here. On a hill a low house, but a long one if you need it, is proper."

"Oh," he said slowly, thinking. "Seems reasonable. But tall is the kind Smithson always builds."

"I know," answered Judith. Smithson was responsible for a good deal, in the city.

Again Ellis searched her face. "You don't care for my city house?"

She had to tell the truth. "For my taste," she acknowledged, "it's a little—ornate."

"That's ornamental?" he asked. "But that's what

I like about it. Don't the rest of my neighbours care for it any more than you do?"

"Some do not," she admitted.

"I guess that most of you don't, then," he decided. "Well, well, how a fellow makes mistakes! One of those quiet buildings with columns, now, such as I tore down, I suppose would have been just the thing?"

"Yes," she said. "But Mr. Ellis, you mustn't think——"

He smiled. "Never mind, Miss Blanchard. You would say something nice, I'm sure, but the mischief's done; the building's there, ain't it?"

"I wish——" she began.

"And really I'm obliged to you," he went on. "Because I might have built a house here just like the other. Now we'll have it right—if I decide to build here at all."

"Then you've not made up your mind?"

"Almost," he said. "The bargain's all but closed. Only it seems so useless, for a bachelor." He looked at her a moment. "Give me your advice," he begged. "Sometimes I think I'm doing the foolish thing."

"Why, Mr. Ellis, what can I—and it's not my affair."

"Make it your affair!" he urged. "This is very important to me. I don't want to sicken these people by crowding in; you saw what Miss Fenno thought of me this afternoon. But if there is any chance for me—what do you say?"

It was the mention of Miss Fenno that did it. She sprang up in Judith's consciousness, clothed in her armour of correctness—proper, prim, and stupid. And in Judith was roused wrath against this type of her life, against her class and its narrowness. She obeyed her impulse, and turned a quickening glance on him.

"Would you turn back now?" she asked.

"That is enough!" he cried, with sudden vehemence.

For a while they stood and said no more. Judith saw that he looked around him on the level space where his house was to stand; then he cast his glance down toward those estates which he would overlook. His eye almost flashed—was there more of the hawk or the eagle in his gaze? Judith thought it was the eagle; she knew she had stirred him anew to the struggle, and was exhilarated. Unmarked at the moment, she had taken a step important to them both. She had swayed him to an important decision, and had become in a sense an adviser.

Yet aside from that, she had stimulated him strangely. Her enthusiasm was communicable—not through its loftiness, for from that he shrank with mistrust, but through its energy and daring. She drew him in spite of her ignorance and misconceptions: dangerous as these might be to him if she should come to learn the truth about his practices, he thought that in her love of action lay an offset to them, while her restlessness and curiosity were two strong motives in his favour. She was fearless, even bold, and that high spirit of hers had more charm for him than all her beauty. He did not see, and it was long before he understood, that something entirely new in him had been roused by contact with her; the most that he felt was that he was satisfied as never before, that she had strengthened his impulse to work and to achieve, and that with her to help him he would be irresistible. Yes, he had chosen well!

CHAPTER IX

NEW IDEAS

A PARTING shot in conversation sometimes rankles like the Parthian's arrow. So it had been with Pease. Beth had said to him: "How can you think you know life, when you live so much alone?"—words to that effect. He had had no chance to defend himself to her, and in consequence had been defending himself to himself ever since. Truly a serious mind is a heavy burden.

Finally he had come down to Chebasset to get the matter off his mind; at least, such was his real purpose. He coloured it with the intention of "looking in at the mill," and gave Mather a few words at the office. Mather had been working at his desk, as Mr. Daggett, the Harbour Commissioner, had found and left him. Orders, Mather said, were piling in too fast.

Pease smiled. "Enlarge, then."

"Delay in profits," warned Mather. "No dividend this' quarter."

"Go ahead just the same," said Pease. "I hoped for this."

Mather began writing. "Come, leave work," invited Pease. "I'm going up to the Blanchards'. Come with me."

"I'm ordering coal and material," said Mather. "We have plenty of ore, but the new work must begin soon."

Pease struck his hand upon the desk. "Do you

mean," he demanded, "that you are writing about the enlargements already?"

"Plans were made long ago," answered Mather.

"What do you do for exercise?" cried Pease. "How do you keep well? I'll not be responsible, mind, for your breakdown when it comes."

But he made no impression and went away alone, climbed the hill, and found the Blanchards on their piazza. Ellis was more than he had bargained for, and the Colonel had never been exactly to Pease's taste, but they departed, leaving him alone with Beth. She presently noticed the signs that he was endeavouring to bring the conversation to a particular subject, as one becomes aware of a heavy vessel trying to get under way. So she gave him the chance to speak.

"Miss Blanchard," he said, when he found that he might forge ahead, "you said something the other day—other evening—against which I must defend myself. That I live much alone."

She remembered at once, flashed back in her mind to that whole conversation, and was ready to tease him. Tease him she did as he began his explanation; she refused to be persuaded that he did not live alone. He might enumerate dinners, might point to his pursuits, might speak of the hundred people of all classes with whom he came in close daily contact: she would not acknowledge that she had been wrong.

"You are your mind," she declared, "and your mind is aloof."

He would have grieved, but that he felt again, dimly as before, that she was rallying him. And he was pleased that she did not fear him, nor call him Sir—that title which causes such a painful feeling of seniority. She gave him a feeling of confidence, of youthfulness, which had not been his even in boyhood. He had been

"Old Pease" then; he was "Old Pease" to many people still. The respect in which young and old held him was a natural, if very formal atmosphere. This defiance of Beth's came upon him like a fresh breeze, bringing younger life. He threw off his earnestness at last and laughed with her at himself.

"Upon my word!" thought the Colonel, on whose ears such laughter had a new sound. He looked out of the window; Pease was actually merry. "Second childhood," grinned the Colonel, as he returned to his writing.

Beth discovered that Pease was no fossil, and began to enjoy herself less at his expense but more for other reasons. He could never lose the flavour of originality, for his odd manner's sake. Even as he sat and laughed he was upright and precise, though the twinkle was genuine and the noise was hearty. Then she rose from the tea-table, and they went to the piazza's edge together. There they discovered Judith returning with Ellis.

"Come away," said Beth quickly; "there are places where we can go. They have not seen us; take your hat."

This was wonderful, slipping with a girl away from other people, and Pease felt the delight of it. Fleeing by passages he had never seen, in a house he had never before entered, smacked of the youthful and romantic. Beth brought him out behind the house, and thirty seconds put them in shrubbery. She led the way, not suspecting that his mental vision was dazzled by new vistas.

For Pease would have faced Ellis and Judith as a duty, borne with their conversation, and returned home without a sigh for the wasted hour. Such was his conception of life—to take what was sent, nor avoid the unpleasant. It had gone so far that in some matters he did not consult his own feelings at all, but gave his

time to others, recognising himself as a trustee for their benefit. The good which can be done in such a way is enormous, in business or professional matters merely; but Pease had carried the habit into his social scheme, and was therefore the sufferer from his own good nature, the victim of every bore. It was a revelation that one could exercise choice, and could flee (losing dignity, but gaining in romance) from the unpleasant. So that boyish thrill came over him, with a manly one besides as he felt the compliment Beth paid him. It put them on a closer footing when, laughing and out of breath, she sat in a garden seat and motioned him to take the place beside her.

"Do you think me foolish?" she asked.

"Not at all!" he answered eagerly.

"But perhaps you wished to stay and meet Mr. Ellis?"

"Not for anything!" he averred.

Then she looked at him soberly. "What do you think of him?" She posed him, for polite vagueness was his desire, and he could not find the words.

"He is——" he hesitated, "very—er, pleasant, of course. Not my—kind, perhaps."

"And you really do not like him," she stated, so simply and confidently that in all innocence he answered "Yes," and then could have bitten his tongue off.

"Neither do I," she acknowledged.

And so those two took the same important step which Judith and Ellis had already taken—of showing true feeling to each other, and breaking rules thereby. For Beth, while not reserved, chose her confidants carefully, after long trial; and Pease's habit had been never to acknowledge personal feeling against any one, least of all a business rival.

"Judith has encouraged him before," said Beth.

"People talked of her when she met him; they will do so the more now that she has asked him here. Not that she will care for that, Mr. Pease, but I shall not enjoy it."

"Of course you will not," he agreed.

They hovered on the verge of confidences for a moment, then Beth took the plunge. She looked at Pease with a little distress in her eyes. "Judith is headstrong," she said. "She is discontented, but does not know what she wants. I have sometimes thought that George Mather, if he only knew how, might——"

"Yes," said Pease, filling the pause. "I wish he did. He is not happy himself, poor fellow. They have been intimate?"

"Till within a little while. But they are both too masterful. And yet I sometimes think she has him always in mind, but as if defying him, do you understand?"

"Indeed?" he murmured.

"I hope," said Beth, "that this acquaintance of hers with Mr. Ellis is just a phase of that. If it is not, and if she should—Judith cares so little for people's opinions, you know."

"It would be very—painful," murmured Pease. "But it has not come to anything of that sort yet?"

"No, but I know Judith so well that I don't know what she'll do." And Beth concluded her confidences in order to draw some from Pease. The sort of man Ellis was: could he be called dishonest? He was not of course a gentleman? Pease cast off restraint and answered frankly; she found he had considerable power of defining his thoughts, saying that Ellis had never been proved dishonest, but that his conscience seemed no bar to questionable actions; that he was unrefined, good-natured when he had conquered, rough in breaking his way. What his personal charms might be Pease had

never had the chance to determine. Mrs. Harmon seemed to like him—but one must not judge by that, because—and silence fell for a moment, as they looked at each other with understanding.

It seems simple and so commonplace, but this was one of the talks which *accomplish*, bringing the speakers together as nothing else can do. Such talks build human ties; Pease and Beth formed one now. By the time they saw Ellis going away they had new feelings toward each other, differing in degree and result—for Beth knew friendship well, but to Pease it was altogether astonishing and momentous. When Ellis was well away Pease also took his leave and followed down the winding road.

"Tell Mr. Mather to come," were Beth's last words to him.

So Pease went again to the mill, where Mather was still in the office. Pease had little finesse, and went about his errand directly.

"Miss Jenks," he said, and the stenographer vanished.

"Anything?" asked Mather.

Pease put his hand on his shoulder. "Just a message," he answered. "Miss Elizabeth Blanchard——"

"Oh, Beth, you mean," said Mather.

"Yes," replied Pease. "She told me to tell you to come and see them."

"Indeed?" asked Mather.

"She was particular about it," Pease urged. "She meant something by it."

"Thanks," was all Mather said. "Now these enlargements, Mr. Pease. You meant what you said?"

"Yes, yes," answered Pease impatiently, and closed his hand on the other's shoulder. "And I mean this: Take Miss Blanchard's advice. Good day." He went

to the door, and turned. "Ellis was up there this afternoon."

On his way home he did little thinking, but he felt. He had touched people's lives in a new way; he felt the breath of Mather's romance, and warmed at the trust which Beth reposed in him. Odd quivers ran through him, strange little impulses toward his kind, calling him to a youth which his life had earlier denied him. It was not possible for him to understand their meaning, but they were pleasurable.

In like manner Mather gave that evening to musings concerning persons rather than things. To follow his new line of conduct with Judith, or (now that Ellis had appeared again) to turn once more and earnestly pursue her—which? Clearly he saw that Judith would go her own way, would play with fire, would even burn her fingers for all that he could do. He must wait, be her friend, and having once said his say, must never again bother her with his warnings.

And Ellis, that evening, also mused upon the Blanchards, though his thoughts were very definite. On leaving the house he had borrowed the newspaper; the Colonel had asked him to post some letters in the city. When in the train, Ellis turned the newspaper to the stock-market reports and studied the Colonel's pencilings. Blanchard had underlined the names of certain stocks usually considered skittish rather than safe, and had made multiplications in the margin. When Ellis came to post the letters, very deliberately he read the addresses. Some were meaningless to him, but one bore the address of a broker whose reputation was quite as uncertain as the value of the stocks he chiefly dealt in. Ellis did not cast off thought until he reached his house.

Then he looked up at the Gothic building and scanned

its various projections. "Ornate?" he murmured. "Well, wait till the inside is properly beautified!"

He spoke lightly, but when he entered the house his feeling changed. The great hall was dim and shadowy; seldom aired, it seemed cold. In front of him wound the huge staircase; to left and right were dusky apartments which echoed his steps. Since he first built the place it had satisfied him, but fresh from the influence of Judith, suddenly he saw the house as it was. Empty, gloomy, it was but a vast artificial cave, without life or warmth. For the second time a wistfulness, misunderstood, almost bewildering, came over him, and he wondered if anybody—somebody!—would ever brighten the house for him, and make it a home.

CHAPTER X.

DRAWN BOTH WAYS

THOSE youthful promptings which so stirred Pease, far beyond his own comprehension, kept working in him through the summer weeks. The joy of living, which he supposed he had mastered, appeared to him an altered thing, so that its object no longer reposed on shelves in his study, but moved serenely in a cottage above the harbour at Chebasset. Pease accepted the change with the innocence which was particularly his, and followed his new chase with but slight idea that he was varying from his usual course. For being a man of social preciseness, he was given to making calls, and made no distinction between the kind to which he was habituated, the so-named duty call, and the new visit which was made for pleasure. Mather wondered, after a few unusual appearances of Pease at the mill, if the banker was overseeing his work; but as on each occasion Pease went farther up the hill Mather put the visits down to the right cause.

As most people are gifted with that kind of insight which the manager thus exercised, others as well came to note Pease's actions, and their cause, before the banker did himself. Miss Cynthia, who spent summer as well as winter in the city (for since her poor people could not get away, neither would she), came early to know what seed she had planted in her cousin's breast. For he was open as the day, and without thought of concealment told her where he was going or where he

had been. Miss Cynthia set her mouth at each mention of Chebasset, but as they came oftener she began to consider if she should not have to give up her chamber, the best in the house, and take the one in the rear. Or perhaps it might be best to live elsewhere altogether. But looking at her cousin one day, all his goodness seemed lost in his homeliness and lack of charm. So she smiled the grim smile of pity, and set about making him more comfortable at home than ever.

Mather also had occasion to smile thus, when one day he allowed Beth Blanchard's word of advice to move him at last. He had seen Ellis more than once in Chebasset, and felt uneasy; Pease looked in one afternoon and asked him to go up to the Blanchards'. As usual, Mather refused, but after an hour he started up the hill, to be passed by Pease coming down. They were on different ways, for Mather had just left the high road for a path which would save distance, when looking back he saw Pease going down the hill. Pease wore a flower which he had not had before; he was smiling cheerfully, with a retrospective air, and Mather smiled also, grimly as Miss Cynthia had done, at the thought of the late plant of love springing in the barren soil of middle-age.

He went on to the Blanchards' house; Judith was not there. But Beth welcomed him and sat him down, gave him tea, and talked to him as he sat half-silent.

"People do not see much of you nowadays," she said with a tone of reproach. "You are much too busy, George."

"Oh, well——!" he shrugged inattentively, and Beth might interpret as she pleased. She looked at him as he sat, with his chair against the piazza railing, his arm across it, and his face turned to look out upon the bay. He was neither gloomy nor resigned, but bore

the look of a strong man waiting. Time was not of account to him.

"You do not worry much," she said.

"Not I," he answered, but he turned to her. "Is there anything to worry about, little Beth?"

"Sometimes I think so," she replied. "I think that now you'd better stay to dinner."

"Thank you," he said, looking at her more carefully. "I suppose you know best," he added.

There had never been anything between these two except undefined good-feeling, expressed only by the inattentive conversation of those who have often met in the same house with different interests. There had existed, besides, that consciousness of a difference in age which makes a few years seem almost a generation, so that with boys and girls "sets" are separated by a bar of habit which prevents an older from seeing anything in a younger, even after the passage of years has brought them both to maturity. Thus, to Mather, Beth had always been a little girl, until just now her quiet, assured carriage, as she interfered in his affairs, opened his eyes. For she answered his last remark with confidence.

"Yes, I know best." And he believed her.

"Talk to me," he said, turning still more toward her. "I have seen no one for a long time. Who is doing? What is doing?" So Beth talked to him.

This was her mission in life—to talk people into cheerfulness and bring them nearer the rest of the world. She enjoyed it always, but it was especially pleasant to her as she spoke with Mather. For he was real, he was big, he was not baulked by conditions which might have been too much for him. Estrangement from Judith was not, she was glad to see, making him melancholy. He seemed in good physical condition; though he had

not gone much with people of late, she had seen him from her window, early in the morning, sailing on the bay before he went to his work. It was not Judith alone, therefore, but work also, that kept him from going about. All this she felt, or guessed, as she told him of little matters.

"It is too bad," she said after a while. "You should have a mother, or a sister, to tell you all this."

"That Esther Fenno is away yachting, or that John Watson is attentive to Mary Carr?" He laughed. "But, Beth, you shall be my sister of mercy, and I will come here oftener."

"Come, then," she said. "Some day there will be better or more important items, and you may be glad of the bargain. Or if you happen to call on Judith when Mr. Ellis does, you may talk with me."

"Couldn't he do that?" He maintained the appearance of jesting, but she said seriously:

"I don't like him."

Then he put out his hand to her; she took it, and Judith came upon them thus.

A pang shot through him as he rose and greeted her; she was quiet in her manner—his coming could not move her in the least. He wished he might feel that there had been a flash of inquiry in her first glance at him and Beth, but her face had not really changed. She welcomed him kindly enough. "He is going to stay to dinner," said Beth. Judith answered with a conventional "Good!" Then the Colonel appeared; he had brought the mail.

"A letter for you, Judith," he said. "A thick package, rather."

Thoughtlessly, she opened it. Ellis had promised to send her his house-plans, and for the purpose had had a set made, much reduced in size. He had mailed them

to her himself; but for carelessness she would have recognised his hand. The Colonel, always inquisitive, craned his neck as Judith drew the plans from the envelope.

"Plans!" he exclaimed. "Are you going into building, Judith?"

She looked at the upper plan, carelessly as before, though the red came into her cheek. Then she put them all back into the paper. "No, I'm not going to build," she said.

"This reminds me," said the Colonel. "They say Ellis has bought the Welton place."

"Indeed!" cried Beth. Her glance sought Mather's; his responded, cynically humorous. That he should be there when the news was given! But he turned to the Colonel.

"That must be very recent, sir."

"It may not be so," replied he, "but Kingston is hopping for fury, and Dent for fright, because they'll be his neighbours. Judith, do you happen to know if the news is true?"

In spite of herself, she looked at the floor. "Yes, it is true."

"Aha!" cried the Colonel. "Then those plans——" She looked up now, and flashed him into silence.

"I think," said Judith, "that I will go and dress for dinner." She went, and Beth went also, casting a glance of sympathy at Mather.

"Will you come in?" asked the Colonel nervously of his guest.

"I'll stay here, thank you. Don't let me keep you, sir."

"Thanks. I think I will fix up."

Mather smiled scornfully at the relief the Colonel showed. Alone, he leaned against a pillar and looked

out over the bay. So this was what he had come to learn! And being here, he must stay and put the matter through.

It was a miserable meal. Judith was furious with her father; Beth was appalled at the length to which matters appeared to have gone. Mather and the Colonel struggled manfully, and spoke of matters in the business world. The Colonel inclined toward the subject of stocks.

"Consolidated," he suggested. "Don't you think it a good investment?"

"I am leaving silver alone," responded Mather. "I consider all those stocks very unsafe just now, sir."

So with that radical difference of opinion between them, which really concerned the Colonel more than he would show, conversation languished even between the gentlemen. Out upon the piazza, after dinner, matters went more smoothly, but Mather concluded that it was wiser to "eat and run" than to stay where constraint hung in the air like a fog. So, pleading the habit of early sleep, he took his leave.

Then Judith, fearing that he had been suffering, roused herself. "I will go with you to the gate," she said, as he offered his hand for good-by. They left the piazza together, but Beth, catching his eye to signal satisfaction, saw him shake his head. Judith's condescension could no longer thrill him. Beth felt that his attitude, for one who was so concerned, was strangely like that of an observer.

And Judith felt it, too. He had passed through the stage of eager homage, a favour could no longer enrapture him; she wondered if he had even noticed the incident of the house-plans—whether, after all, he had been hurt, so steadily he had borne himself. When they

were alone together, walking toward the gate, he turned to her a gaze almost quizzical.

"Have you forgiven me my chimney, Judith?"

Thus he drew a smile from her; then, for the first time, he spoke of his mill, but left her no burden of answering. The walk was short, and he filled it with tales of his men, their weaknesses, their characteristics, the troubles which some of them had confided to him. But he said nothing of his difficulties or of his growing success, though as he talked she thought of them.

"Does it not please you," she asked, "that people speak well of what you are doing?"

"Do they?" was all he answered. "By the way——"

"And the work of organisation?" she asked him.

"It was fun," he said, "and not difficult at all."

"I can't believe you!" she cried.

"Nothing, nothing!" he answered.

"And is all smooth sailing now?"

"One of the men is getting up a strike," he answered.

"That is all."

"A strike!" she exclaimed.

"So the older men tell me. A little one."

"How can you take it so easily?" she asked.

He smiled. "I think I can meet it. Well, here we are at the gate. Thank you for coming, Judith. Good-by." He started away briskly, then turned back. She was looking at him seriously.

"Here is Jim Wayne coming up the road," he said.

"He comes to see Beth?"

"Yes."

"And what of my employer?"

"Poor Mr. Pease!"

"Mr. Pease," repeated Mather. "There it all is in a nutshell. Jim is Jim, twenty-three. Pease is Mr. Pease, forty-five. The young to the young, as

Salvation Yeo said. Poor Pease! Good-night again, Judith."

And this time he was off for good, not turning again. Judith returned thoughtfully to the house. He had interested her—turned her back a little toward her real self, her old self. No small part of the effect he had made was caused by his cheerful self-command. Did he love her still? She thought of what he had done for Chebasset. He was very much of a man.

On the way down the hill Mather passed Wayne. This was that broker's clerk who always nodded to Ellis so carelessly, whose mother Ellis had bought out, and whose name the promoter envied. Handsome, thought Mather as they greeted; on second thought he added, a bit weak. But Mrs. Harmon, looking from her garden as they passed on the road below, thought that Wayne was handsome without qualification. Thus those two, both of whom were to influence Wayne's fate, thought of him as he went on to see Beth. Mrs. Harmon followed him with her eyes until he entered the Blanchards' gate; with her thoughts, still longer. Mather forgot him in grieving for Pease, the poor dreamer who would wake too late.

"Beth," asked Judith, returning to the house, "where was it we read about Salvation Yeo?"

"In Kingsley's 'Westward Ho,'" answered Beth. After Wayne had come and gone, she noticed that Judith was reading the book.

"Do you like it?" asked Beth.

"Romance—love," said Judith. "It seems unnatural." She laid the book aside. "A pleasant evening, Beth?"

"Very," Beth answered.

"And Mr. Pease?" asked Judith.

She saw with surprise that Beth's eyes filled with

tears. "What can I do?" asked the younger sister; but expecting no answer, she went away.

Judith took up her book again, yet held it without opening it. Romance and love had come to Beth; why not to herself? Judith had had suitors; and true love might win her yet. Was it to be found? Such lasting love, she meant, as it was certain Pease would give. No wonder Beth grieved; any woman's heart would be touched by such devotion. Yet as Judith thought of her old suitors she could name half a dozen now married, having forgotten their griefs. But it was Mather who was most in her mind, who ever since his rejection had been so strangely independent, and this evening most of all. He had shown no surprise, no dismay, at the sight of Ellis's house-plans. At the thought Judith started up with pique, resentment—it would have been hard to define her feeling at the thought that Mather needed no one to sorrow for him.

CHAPTER XI

AN INCIDENT AT THE MILL

ON a morning when Beth took her turn at marketing she met Mather on the street. "It's four days since you were at the house," she reminded him.

"Is there really any advantage in my coming often?" he asked her.

"I don't know," she answered plaintively. "But Judith has very little to do. You might ask her to visit the mill."

"Come any time. Both of you," he responded.

"I'll bring her this morning," she said quickly.

But when Mather had been another hour at the mill he forgot the engagement thus made. For in going about he noticed that the quiet in the place was different from the bustle of ordinary days; the men seemed expectant. Then as he passed near one of the older workmen the man spoke to him under his voice.

"Look out this morning, sir."

"The strike is coming, Ferguson?" Mather asked, at once alert.

"Yes, sir."

Mather returned to his desk in the office. He believed that the strike, if it came so soon, would be ill-planned. The day was warm; all doors and windows were open to admit the harbour breeze; as he looked through the screen-door into the mill he watched one man in particular. Though the fellow's station was at a window, he

seemed hotter than his neighbours: his face was flushed; he wiped his brow and moved nervously.

The stenographer rose from her desk and silently laid a slip of paper before Mather. On it was scrawled in pencil: "Wee will stand by you, Mister Mather. Old Hands." Mather smiled; he had but twelve out of seventy workmen who knew what strikes and lockouts meant. Most of the men he had picked up where he could, training them himself; he had no idea how far he could trust them. Instead of giving him confidence, the note suddenly showed how weak his backing was.

"Where did you get this, Miss Jenks?" he asked.

"I found it just now, sir, slipped in among my papers."

"Thank you," he answered, and she went back to her desk, pale and frightened.

The workman whom Mather had been watching kept looking at the clock. It began to strike eleven; at once all eyes were turned on him; all work was suspended during the slow striking. When this ceased, the workman left his place and went to the door of the office; all glances followed him, and the men who were more distant left their stations and crowded to watch. Conscious of the stir he made, the fellow walked with a swagger, but a change came in his manner when, through the screen-door, he saw the quiet manager also eyeing him. He knocked on the door.

"Come in, Stock," said Mather.

Now the main entrance to the office was from outside, through a short passage. At the moment when the workman entered from the mill, Judith and Beth came into the passage; seeing Mather in apparent conference with an employee, they waited until he should be finished. He had wheeled in his chair, and his back was turned to them. "Well, Stock?" he said.

The spokesman of the employees was a lean man,

somewhat wolfish, with an eye that moved too much. He seemed a talker rather than a doer, with something of the actor showing as he stood by the door and folded his arms. He spoke with an important air; no voice, Judith thought, can be impressive if it is not clear.

"I've come to say, sir, that we're dissatisfied."

"That means," asked Mather, quietly and without rising, "that *you* are dissatisfied?"

The man cleared his throat, but still a characteristic huskiness remained. "Yes, sir, I am."

"Very well," was the response, and the manager turned to the stenographer. "Miss Jenks, make out a bill of this man's time."

Beth clutched Judith by the sleeve and sought to draw her away. Judith stood still; not for anything would she have lost the sight of those two men as they watched each other.

"You discharge me?" cried the workman with excitement.

"You discharged yourself," answered Mather steadily. "I can't have a man here who is dissatisfied."

"My grievances——" began the other.

Mather cut him short. "Grievance is a word that doesn't apply. You knew the conditions of work when you came; I have changed none of them."

"Then," cried Stock, "let me tell you from the men——"

"Stop!" ordered Mather; "no one speaks for my men who is not in my employ."

"Just the same——" began Stock, anxiety peering from his eyes. Mather interrupted him again.

"That will do. How much, Miss Jenks? Thanks." He took the money from his pocket and handed it to the workman. "That is correct, I think. Good day, Stock."

The workman was visibly troubled at the turn of events. "This is most improper treatment," he complained. As he turned to the door at his back he ventured a threat. "You shall see!"

"Not that door," said Mather quickly. "Remember that you are no longer a workman here. The other way leads out of doors."

"I must get my hat," the man said, his eye now truly shifty and alarmed. For a second it met Judith's, and she felt that he glared like a trapped rat. Nevertheless, under Mather's glance he moved away from the mill door.

"I will send for your hat," said Mather. He rose and opened the door himself. "Jamison, Stock is leaving us. Will you bring his hat?"

He stood at the open door and waited. Judith looked beyond him into the mill, where machinery rumbled, and in great vats huge cylinders revolved. The men stood and stared at each other, or looked at the door and the manager standing there. Some of the men were shamefaced, some uneasy, some were smiling—and these were the older hands. The man who had gone for the hat had reached the door on his return before any sound rose above the rumble of the machinery.

Then Judith heard a voice, high-pitched and harsh. It needed a look at Stock to make sure his husky tones could become so sharp. He was craning toward the door, sending his voice toward those farthest away.

"Now is the time," he cried, "to assert your manhood!"

Mather took out his watch. "Yes," he said, and though he did not raise his voice Judith noted its splendid carrying power. "Now is your time, boys. Any one dissatisfied, like Stock here, can go with him. I give you three minutes."

One of the older men laughed aloud, and standing above a vat began raking in it, apparently, with a hooked pole. Others turned to their work, yet they all kept their attention on those of the younger men who stood still. Judith felt her hands grow cold, and knew her heart was beating faster, for half of the men had not moved. Then fingers as cold as her own took her hand, and Beth pressed up to her side. The older men stopped work again, the man above the vat stood with pole suspended, and Stock gave a little dramatic laugh.

"One minute!" said Mather clearly.

The men's eyes were on him, Judith's eyes also. He was calm and perfectly confident; he had no word to say, but he seemed massive as his own chimney, and as hard to move. His eye roved among the men, then turned to the office, and for an instant met those of the frightened stenographer. He gave a smile of confidence, looked at his watch, then turned again to his men.

"A minute and a half!"

His voice seemed to ring out a challenge. Before it the men broke. One who stood nearest the door, smiling feebly, turned and shuffled toward his place. He gave the signal to the others. One by one they went to work, but this time the older men last, until the man by the vat, with a disdainful sniff, plunged his pole again into the liquid. Then Stock, reaching for his hat, snatched it and almost ran from the office. In the passage he fairly crowded Judith and Beth against the wall. Mather, turning to look after him, saw the sisters.

At once he closed the solid door into the mill, cutting out the sounds and bringing quiet. "Come in," he said to Judith. "How long have you been there?"

"About three minutes," she answered, entering. She looked him in the eye; he saw that she was excited,

and flushed under the admiration which showed in her glance.

"I am sorry you ran into this," he said. "I had not expected it for a fortnight."

"I am glad," she returned. "What a peaceful spot this will be for a while. You will show us over the mill?"

"Not when this has just happened," he answered. "It would be too much like showing off the animals I had tamed. Will you excuse me?"

"I must see the office, then," she said. "Open your safe: pretend I am a bank inspector, do!"

He laughed and introduced the sisters to Miss Jenks, laid out his books, opened the safe, and challenged their criticism. Judith had never been in an office before: the excitement of what she had just seen still dominated her. To the stenographer's eyes she was dazzling, enchanting; even Mather, though he told himself that the interest would pass, was deeply pleased. He showed the store-room with its stock of sheet metal, the yard, the wharf, the coal-pockets. Returning to the mill, the three entered the office again.

"It is almost twelve," said Beth, looking at the clock.

A new interest took Judith, and she did not hear. Miss Jenks was at work at her typewriter; she realised that Judith was watching her—critically, of course. The magnificent Miss Blanchard must be above such a thing as typewriting.

But Judith was interested rather than critical as she watched the clever fingers at their work. It did not seem hard, and it fascinated her as at each stroke a long type-arm sprang up, reached over, and struck upon the paper. Letters grew to words, words to lines—and a faint glow spread over the stenographer's face as Miss

Blanchard moved forward to her side and looked down at her work.

"You don't mind, do you?" asked Judith.

Miss Jenks did mind; she was nervous and almost frightened, but she stuck to her task. Judith bent lower over the machine, knitting her brow as she studied its working. The regular movement of the carriage, the flashing type-arms, the flying fingers, and the result in violet print, took strong hold of her.

"There," said Miss Jenks at last, flushing deeply, "the letter is ready for Mr. Mather's signature." She drew it from the machine and handed it to Judith.

"Is it so very hard?" asked Judith, glancing at the letter for but a moment, then fixing the stenographer with an earnest eye. "Did you have to study long?"

"At the typewriting?" asked Miss Jenks. "No, I picked that up quickly. But shorthand is not easy at all." She took from the desk a note-book and offered it to Judith. "Those are my notes of what Mr. Mather dictated."

The pothooks on the paper meant nothing to Judith, but she saw that they were very few. "Is this whole letter in these signs?" she asked. "Indeed! It must be hard to learn." She looked still harder at the stenographer, who blushed again under the intense scrutiny. Judith was thinking that if this little, anæmic girl could learn shorthand, surely she could do so herself.

"But Judith," said Beth, interposing, "you are keeping her from her work."

"The letters are all finished," murmured Miss Jenks, glad to turn her embarrassed eyes elsewhere.

Judith moved to the typewriter and looked down at it. Until this morning she had never seen one except in an advertisement; its shiny complications grew more

attractive. She said nothing, but Beth smiled at Mather mischievously.

"Try it," she suggested to Judith.

"Oh, if you will!" exclaimed Miss Jenks. She slipped a sheet of paper into place and placed the chair for Judith. "Will you not?" she invited. Judith took the seat.

"You can begin," suggested Miss Jenks, "by striking the letters one by one. You press this key——"

"For capitals; yes, I saw," Judith replied. "No, I will try to write without practising. To whom, Beth?"

"Tell Mr. Pease," Beth suggested, "that you approve of his manager."

So Judith wrote, dating, addressing, and beginning to explain that she liked the mill. It—she bit her lip—was not quite so easy as it might be, nor—as she finished a line without mistake, and released her lip again—so very hard after all. She became interested, forgot the others, and talked to herself.

"R—where's R? Oh, thanks. That was not hard enough; it scarcely printed. Now Y—here! Now the end of the line; how easily this runs. Beth, how do you spell——?"

Then they laughed at her, and she rose. "Judith, it's almost twelve," said Beth again. "Let's get away before the workmen do."

"George," Judith said to Mather, "let me look into the mill once more."

He opened the door again. The cylinders were still turning; the men were busy—they even looked cheerful. And but for Mather's firm hand the mill might at this moment be empty and idle! She gave him a glance of frank approval as she turned to say good-bye. On the way home she was so silent that Beth wondered if she were moved by what she had seen.

In fact, Judith was deeply moved. Never before had she seen such a sight as that in the office, and the qualities displayed by Mather had impressed her. Thus to stand up against a danger, thus to handle men—it seemed to Judith as if he had done something almost great. His coolness and success were heroic; for the rest of the day he occupied her mind; she sat on the piazza, even at the table, with thoughts visibly abstracted, and Beth at last became so impressed that she sought the telephone when Judith was out of hearing, meaning to give Mather a piece of advice. But he was no longer at the office; Miss Jenks said he had gone to the city.

“I am very sorry,” said Beth.

“So am I,” sympathised Miss Jenks.

“I wanted to ask him to come up here this evening,” said Beth. “You are sure I cannot get him at his hotel?”

“Very sure,” replied Miss Jenks. So Beth, much disappointed, left the telephone.

Miss Jenks could have told Beth more. When the sisters had gone from the mill, the stenographer found in the typewriter a sheet which she took out and laid silently before her employer. He looked at it for a while, then—tore it up. He had passed beyond the stage of treasuring reminders of his lady. Only the day before he had found and destroyed a little hoard of mementos which seemed to reproach him with his lack of success. Judith, he told himself with that grimness which was a feature of his self-control, did not exactly inspire poetic dreaming. So he destroyed the letter, but when his day’s word was over he turned reluctantly from going to see her.

Miss Jenks saw his hesitation as, after putting on his hat, he stood at the door and visibly asked himself:

'Which way?' To the right led up the hill and to Judith; to the left would bring him to his cottage; straight ahead stood a trolley-car ready to start back to the city. The little stenographer would have been wise enough to send him where, at that moment, Judith was thinking of him. But like a man he blundered.

"Hang it!" he thought, "she doesn't want to see me all the time." He counted up that he had seen her twice in one week; Sunday was the earliest that he could go again. Also he remembered Ellis's house-plans. So Miss Jenks, with a sense of disappointment which was both personal and unselfish, saw him board the car.

At her house Beth scratched a note to Mather; it contained only the words: "Follow it up!" She would send it in the morning. But after dinner Judith received a telephone message from Mrs. Harmon, asking her if she would not come over for the evening. Judith consented; it would be neighbourly to go.

"Will you come?" she asked of Beth.

"Is the Judge there?" Beth inquired.

"He is in the city."

"Then I think I'll stay at home," decided Beth. She forecasted events exactly. Judith went, stayed most of the evening, and was escorted home by—Ellis. "He came down," Judith vouchsafed, "after I arrived there."

Since morning Judith had been softer, gentler than usual; but now she was lofty again, with her old manner underlaid by excitement. Beth went sadly to her room and tore up her note to Mather.

CHAPTER XII

FORWARDS VARIOUS AFFAIRS

As time passed on, Colonel Blanchard watched with interest, mixed with solicitude, the love-matters of his daughters. Judith's affairs were going to his satisfaction, for though Mather came occasionally to the house, Ellis came oftener. Ellis's land had been bought, his house was going up, and at times he came to discuss his plans with Judith. So far so good, but in another quarter the Colonel was not quite so well pleased, since the visits of Jim Wayne to Beth were becoming very frequent.

Beth was twenty, Jim was twenty-one. He found the way to Chebasset easy to follow, even though he left his mother at home alone—for the Wayne estate was low in the world, and summer-resorts were not for the widow. She, desolate soul, counted her dollars carefully, and encouraged her son's belief that by selling the house and land to Ellis she had made herself comfortable for life. "It was only for that," he explained to Beth, "I allowed her to sell. And now she doesn't need my earnings, so I use them for myself. She likes me to dress well; she says I'm so like my father that she can't bear to have me look shabby. And it's a mark of a gentleman, don't you think, Beth, to look well?"

It was so sweet of Jim to admire his father, that Beth could not bear to say how the elder Wayne was popularly regarded.

"Why," snorted Mr. Fenno, "what he spent on

clothes, cigars, and wines, would have provided enough insurance to keep his family handsomely."

Fenno, when on the subject, had intended to make it clear to Beth that Jim was too much like his father. Innuendo, however, had failed with Beth—not that she was unable to perceive that Jim had his weaknesses, but she had the habit of championing her favourites against her own judgment. Thus she was sorry for the Judge who had chosen his wife unwisely and could not make her love him, and pitied old Fenno himself, who realised the hollowness of the world only after he had drummed on it for a good many years. She was fond of such men because they were weak, weak though they knew it not themselves, though the world called them strong. And so it was not unnatural that Beth should take into her innermost heart something still weaker to cherish, because she was so strong herself; something with faults, she had so few herself; something which would get into trouble, for she was so used to getting people out. She did not realise that the young fall far deeper into trouble than the old, and that she could not give backbone to a man who had none.

All this is but saying that Beth, wise in the affairs of others, with her own was not so gifted, and was so mistaken as to take Wayne at very nearly his own valuation. For Jim had a dashing air, and dressing in the fashion was the mark of many a girlish eye. He went smooth-shaven; his face had a slightly petulant expression, as if complaining of the world, yet at times he lighted with the fire of optimism, when he told Beth of the things he meant to do. And thus he approached her on two undefended sides, for never had she turned a deaf ear to a call for sympathy, and nothing in a man did she admire so much as aspiration.

Thus their affinity declared itself to them, for Jim

liked to be purred over and strengthened. He enjoyed telling, to an attentive ear, the misfortunes of his family. "That we should have to sell our house to that fellow Ellis!" he said to Beth. "It seems too hard, doesn't it? And to think that in a few years I shall be earning enough to support the old house, if I had it still! But when a fellow's just starting, you've no idea how little they pay. The business world! Ah, Beth, you're lucky to be a girl, so that you don't have to rub up against life!"

He spoke as if life in its hardest form were to be met with only on exchange, and shook his handsome head so convincingly that Beth believed him. She enjoyed believing him; it gave her pleasure to think Jim a man of the world. In fact, he carried himself very well, with none of those mannerisms which so often betray inexperience. Little allusions to dissipation are very common, but Jim was not given to these, and in consequence seemed more manly than those of his set whom she met. Of course Jim took wine when her father offered it; believing in her father as she did, she thought it no sign of dissipation when he or others drank at his table. It was a pleasure to Beth that Jim and the Colonel were congenial, with more than one topic in common. For example, Wayne had a nice taste in wines, fostered by his lamented parent, and could discuss with Blanchard the merits of his '68 and '72. Jim liked the Colonel's tobacco, also, and never failed to commend it. But most of all the two enjoyed speaking of the stock-market and all which to it pertained. The Colonel always asked Jim for the "news of the street," which the two discussed with as much seriousness as if Jim were not young and the Colonel flighty. To these talks Judith and Beth always listened silently—Judith because she knew there would be no use to say

anything, Beth because she did not suppose that anything was to be said.

Thus when the Colonel led the talk to Consolidated one evening, Judith remembered, but Beth forgot, that Mather had advised against all silver stocks until they should become settled. To Beth stocks were mere names, unembodied nothings without power either to wreck lives or to make people happy.

"Great possibilities," said Jim, wagging his head.

"Must go up soon, I think," commented her father, with deliberation.

"Sure!" Jim assented heartily.

Such incomplete sentences and bits of slang meant wisdom to Beth, and when Judith rose from the table, the younger sister still remained sitting to hear what further Delphic utterances might be made.

"Always said Argent would slump," stated the Colonel.

"I got out of that some time ago," declared Jim.

"Wise!" Blanchard said approvingly, not knowing that Jim's single share had been sold under pressure of necessity, when his mother, in one of the few decisive moments of her life, declared that Jim himself must buy the new carpet for his room, since she thought the old one still good enough for a couple of years' wear. Jim had at first meant to have a good carpet, then he decided on a rug, and a large part of his Argent went into something Turkish, while a little of what was left was devoted to adorning his person. One small share of Consolidated remained as an investment, and Jim was now looking for that to rise again to the point at which he had bought it.

Jim was an optimist with the instinct of self-approval, and being "in" Consolidated he had picked up the expressions which had fallen in his hearing, justifying

him in his wisdom in buying and his hopefulness in waiting. He told the Colonel what Baxter said, and what Winster said, and especially what Bullfinch had declared in regard to the stock. Now, Bullfinch was that broker with whom the Colonel had his dealings.

"He said 'Hang on'?" asked Blanchard with pleasure.

"Yes," said Jim. "And I heard him giving Baxter a tip, sir, which I will pass on to you, if you're interested. He said: 'Watch Poulton Mining and Milling.'"

"Indeed?" murmured the Colonel.

"Now, you wouldn't think that, would you, sir?" asked Jim. "It's down, way down; why, it's been down for a couple of years! I had forgotten about it, almost. But now I'm watching it myself. It has moved a little lately, up a point and down again. Looks as if some one were interesting himself in it, don't you think?"

"May be," assented the Colonel judicially.

"If Consolidated rises, I'm thinking of taking my money out and putting it into Poulton. What should you say to that, Colonel?"

"Where is Poulton now?" asked Blanchard.

"Twelve and a half," answered Jim.

"Well," explained the Colonel, "the way I have always looked at these things is this. If your money is in a low-priced stock, and it rises a dozen points, then perhaps you double. But if your money is in something high-priced, then on the rise you only make twelve per cent."

"If only," said Jim, "one could be sure which stock will rise!"

"You can make sure by watching," asserted the Colonel.

Once Ellis came in as one of these conversations was

in progress; he stood listening while the two amateurs finished their duologue.

"Don't you think so?" they had appealed to him at the end.

"Ah, well," replied the master of finance, "you seem to have got hold of something there." Then he went out on the piazza with Judith, leaving the enthusiasts still more cheerful.

"Your father doesn't act on those ideas of his?" he asked of Judith.

"I hope not—I think not," she answered. "He just likes to talk with Jim."

"Dabbler!" was Ellis's characterization of the young man. Meanwhile the dabblers still babbled within the house, in high good humour with themselves.

It will be noticed that the summer had brought progress to Ellis, in fact almost intimacy with Judith. Their closer acquaintance, begun over his house-plans, had been materially forwarded by Mrs. Harmon, when she invited Judith to her house on the evening of Mather's strike.

Previously, she had been very curious to know how he had got on with Judith. That the girl had supplanted her as chief adviser she became aware, and was in the beginning a little piqued thereat. When she first saw a sketch of the new house, her face fell.

"Oh, *that* kind of a house!" she exclaimed. "Why, that's all very well for a man with an income like my husband's, but for you it seems too simple."

"I like it," he replied without explanation.

"But no carvings," she persisted. "No turrets, or anything of that sort."

"No, no," he said; "this is the only thing."

"But really, change it!" she urged. "Why, it doesn't represent you. It might be anybody's house!"

"The object isn't to attract attention," Ellis replied. "Quiet and dignity are more genteel." He quoted Judith so exactly (all but for the one word) that Mrs. Harmon perceived it.

"Oh," she exclaimed with some chagrin. "I see, it's Judith makes you do this. Of course, if you want to!"

"Now," he said with a rough tolerance, "think it over. She's right, you'll find. A city house down here won't fit. The girl has lived abroad, remember; she ought to know."

Mrs. Harmon had reflected and acquiesced. Common sense was fundamental to both her and Ellis, and combined with more frankness than was usual in the Judge's circle kept them on good terms. Ellis had laid his hand on her shoulder while he urged her to consider; she had not resented the sign of their understanding.

"Well," she said, "Judith knows a good deal, and perhaps I am wrong." Right or wrong, she did not intend that she and Ellis should fall out. Life was dull for her sometimes; she liked to have him dropping in. And then those trinkets. She turned the bracelet on her wrist.

"This is very attractive," she said.

He grunted indifferently.

"It's odd," she said further, "and bracelets aren't worn very much. It attracts attention."

"That's what Price expected," he responded. She never thanked him for his gifts more than by such commendations; he did not expect more.

But she was on each occasion interested to know how he got on with Judith. He knew she kept account of his visits there. "Go oftener," she urged him once. He was wiser, and refused. "You don't follow it up

very quickly," she repeatedly said, but "all in good time" was the most she could get out of him.

"What do you talk about with her?" she asked.

"The doings in the city," he answered. "The big things going on anywhere."

"Does that get you very far with her?" she asked in surprise.

"As far as I can get," he replied.

She thought to advise him. "You don't understand girls, Stephen. The talk you give her isn't what she wants. A girl of her age needs—flattery, you know, and nice little things said."

"You'd make me into a Jim Wayne," he retorted. "A monkey in a Panama, saying foolish things." Mrs. Harmon drew herself up, but he did not perceive. "Pretty fool I'd be, saying the things he does. I heard a talk of his and Beth's, and this is the sort of thing he said—." But Ellis misrepresented Jim entirely, having looked at him from a strictly personal point of view. The conversation, harmless as it was, is best taken at first hand.

"How swell you look to-night!" Jim had begun. "Gad, that rose in your hair—trust a girl to know what's nifty!"

"Don't be silly," Beth replied.

"Straight!" Jim protested. "Never saw you look so stunning. This moonlight brings it all out, you know. Poetic, Beth, on my word! I say, let's go down on the beach, and you can recite me that thing of Tennyson's."

"Shelley's," Beth corrected him.

"Just as good," said Jim cheerfully. "Come on, do!"

Such is the literal report of a conversation which Beth thought highly delightful, but which Ellis delivered with some distortion of manner and word, calculated to throw discredit on Wayne's attractions. "Flat and

silly," he characterised it. "Now if you suppose that a man of my age can say that sort of thing to a girl like Judith Blanchard, you're wrong, Lyddy—Lydia, I mean."

She seized her chance to show a little of her true feeling; long ago she had asked him not to use the old nickname. She answered coldly: "Of course, you know your affairs best. And equally of course, you can't do things which Mr. Wayne can."

"Don't be hard on me," he said. "Wayne's all right in his way, but I'm no boy, nor is Judith like her sister. If Wayne's a friend of yours, I'm sorry." For he divined that something more than his use of her name had caused her coldness.

"I scarcely know him," she responded. "But let me tell you that a woman had sometimes rather a man would make a fool of himself by calling her handsome, than be too wise in his talk."

Ellis had no answer ready, and the subject dropped, but before he left he made an attempt at conciliation. "You see, really sometimes I don't understand myself, even, or the girl. I'll try to remember what you say. Keep me in her mind, you know, Lydia."

It was a truth that he spoke: he did not understand the girl, nor himself. He still prized her fire and dreaded her theories, with each meeting he admired her more than ever, but he was finding in her a baffling reserve which taught him that he must go slow. He could not win her out of hand; some spring of action in her there was yet to find, some ideal which he must satisfy. Might it not be too high!—and there lay the new uncertainty in himself, that he was not sure of conquering her, while conquer her he must! For she was growing indispensable to him, all thought of her as a commodity had fled, and he was now familiar with that

longing for her while still he found no name for it. The emotions which he understood were his own ambition and others' greed, he had no knowledge of the finer desires which can be roused in man. So, somewhat puzzled, he laboured to please Judith by the only means he knew, with far more success than might have been expected.

Then came that evening when Mrs. Harmon invited Judith to her house, where Ellis had arrived at almost the same time. It irritated the girl at first to be so evidently brought in his way, and with Mather's achievement in her mind she was for some time cool and quiet, until Mrs. Harmon, with great self-control, took herself out of the room. Then Ellis brought the conversation at once to familiar ground. He told Judith that he had for some time been working to bring about a combination of the cotton manufacturers. "We can control the whole section, and can do much toward setting prices, if this can only be managed."

"You mean to make it a trust?" asked Judith, interested.

"Yes," he said. "But some of the operators are shy, the contracts and the sharing are so intricate. They—I—they don't know what I'm really at."

Judith failed to understand that his reputation stood in the way of complete confidence. "Can't they see that the combination will benefit them?"

"Yes," he answered, "but the scheme scares them. It's big."

"I have heard of a lawyer," she said, "a New Yorker, who gives his whole time to nothing but framing agreements for trusts, and meeting the corporation laws. If you could call him in, couldn't he perhaps make it clear to the others? The advantages, I mean, and the safety?"

"Where did you hear of him?" asked Ellis.

"I read of him," she answered, "in a magazine."

"I never read magazines," he said thoughtfully. "It mightn't be a bad idea. By Gad," he went on, warming, "I think it might be just the thing. A stranger to us all, he'd be able to give confidence, I do believe. And there's so much in it!" He turned to Judith with energy. "Could you find me that magazine?"

"Yes," she answered, all her coldness gone in the rush of interest, as she saw herself influencing affairs. "It is at home."

"Let me walk back with you, then, when you go."

Mrs. Harmon entered, having heard the last part of their talk, having listened, in fact. "Is that the sort of thing she really cares about?" she asked herself in surprise.

It was, indeed, the sort of thing which attracted Judith; no wonder that there was a new light in her eyes when she came home with Ellis. No wonder that Beth tore up her letter to Mather. Judith had gained an interest in the future which put quite out of her mind the memory of the trifling strike at the mill. Ellis promised to tell her if he used her idea; she was eager to know if it bore results. He let her know, before long, that he was working on it; he would tell her if anything happened. Judith scanned daily the reports of industrial affairs, to see if the combination took shape.

Thus that invitation of Mrs. Harmon's was of great value to Ellis, but when the other tried to draw nearer to the girl it proved a different undertaking. Mrs. Harmon was lonely; she wanted companionship; it irritated her that Judith and Beth had cavaliers, while she had none. One day she asked Judith out to drive, and for a while the two sat in the victoria glum and

stupid. They were too widely different in their natures ever to be intimate.

But Mrs. Harmon made the attempt. "Mr. Ellis," she said, choosing the most promising topic, "is a most interesting man, Judith—you will let me call you Judith, won't you?"

"Certainly," was the answer.

"Thank you. And don't forget that my name is Lydia; Mr. Ellis calls me by it at times. Doesn't he fascinate you with what he does?"

That was something which Judith was not prepared to admit. "He is certainly very active in many matters," she replied, wary of what she said, for fear of her companion's tongue.

"He controls so much; he plans and carries out such great things!" went on Mrs. Harmon. "Ah, he is a keen man, my dear. Don't you think so?"

Judith thought so.

"He has a great future before him," prophesied Mrs. Harmon, but she perceived that she roused no answering spasm in Judith's breast. Therefore Mrs. Harmon's artificial palpitation presently subsided, with some suddenness, and she had the feeling that perhaps the young lady was overmuch for her. Before the end of the drive Mrs. Harmon found herself obliged to say, in self-defence:

"Driving makes one so contemplative, don't you think? Sometimes I could drive for hours, just so, perfectly content but saying nothing."

Judith confessed to the same sensation. When Mrs. Harmon was alone, she concluded that the experiment had been fully tried. Later, Judith asked her over to tea, but the situation was so much relieved when other people dropped in that Mrs. Harmon lost hope of a real friendship in that quarter.

CHAPTER XIII

WHICH IS IN SOME RESPECTS UNSATISFACTORY

JIM WAYNE had been going so frequently to Chebasset that people were beginning to talk of it. All foresaw the consummation of his courtship, and some gloomy shakes of the head were given to the subject.

Beth, the older people said, was just such another as Jim's mother: a soft woman, without the power either to restrain a man or to improve him. Such unhappiness as the widow Wayne's was, therefore, reserved to Beth—while Jim should be alive. As Jim was weaker in character than his father, and therefore less dissipated, he promised to live longer. Poor Beth!

Not for these reasons, however, was it that Colonel Blanchard took serious counsel concerning the possibility of interference. For when the inclination of the two young people was unmistakable Blanchard began to consider the side on which it affected him, regretting the hope which seemed about to vanish, that Beth should marry Pease. If only something might be done! The Colonel sought Judith as the person who alone could advise him, though until he opened the subject he had forgotten how seldom they agreed in their views. The Colonel was often conscious that his calibre was different from that of his daughter.

"Judith," he said, "you've been noticing what is going on between Beth and young Wayne? You think there's something in it?"

"If there isn't," she replied, "there will be very soon."

The Colonel took a few fretful paces up and down the room. Then he stopped before her. "What do you think of it?" he demanded.

For a moment Judith considered her answer; it is unpleasant to say things which may be remembered later when one has a brother-in-law. Nevertheless, as usual she spoke the truth. "I wish Beth wouldn't."

"When Pease is ready, too!" complained the Colonel. "Do you suppose he seems too old to her?"

"Beth likes older people," returned Judith. "And she'd be so safe with him."

"Yes," returned the Colonel, accepting all suggestions eagerly. "Yes, of course. Now, isn't there something we can do?"

"For instance?" challenged Judith; seeing that the Colonel had nothing to offer, she went on, "I never knew how to interfere in anything of that sort. Of course, you, as her father——"

"Do you think I could?" asked the Colonel hopefully.

"It's not often done," Judith replied.

The Colonel considered the possibility and shrank from it. Never had he denied anything either to himself or to his daughters; the most he had ever ventured toward his offspring was a petulant remonstrance. This tone, as he saw himself helpless, he took now toward Judith in default of Beth. "It seems hard," he complained. "I've brought her up—you don't know how much thought I've given you two girls. And now she turns back on me!"

"Why father," asked Judith in surprise, "how can it affect you so?"

The Colonel's thoughts rapidly skirted the pit which he had opened for himself. It is a long way from the hope of a rich son-in-law to the consideration of a daughter's happiness, but the Colonel presently covered

it. "Her comfort," he demanded. "Have I nothing at stake there?"

But this was obviously so artificial that he felt Judith could not fail to perceive it. She sat silent, and the Colonel, after changing the subject, presently got himself out of the house. Perhaps he was to be pitied, if to be good-natured, weak, indulgent, deserves a better reward than a vigorous daughter's too-keen comprehension. Besides, the gentle one was turning against him. He nursed his grievance against Beth for a while, then at last found comfort in Judith after all. She at any rate would marry money. If she would only be quick about it!

And the Colonel, free from observation, sat down in the shrubbery to study the newspaper which he had brought with him, in the hope of drawing from its columns of figures information which should tell him where to lay his bet. He was gambling from week to week, quite as if he were laying on the red or black, although the means of his ventures were Consolidated, and (following the hint Jim Wayne had given) Poulton Mining and Milling, besides (a little discovery he had made for himself) Tilly Valley Oil. They were all up a point or two, but the Colonel was not entirely relieved as he studied the figures, because more than a few points were needed in order to make up for the slump of last week.

A man puzzles long at these things, sometimes; the Colonel's time was on him now, making him very peevish. It was hard, hard indeed, that both the market and Beth should go against him.

As regards Beth, the signs of her feeling were unmistakable. The eye of blissful brooding which she now always showed, the loving consideration with which she fulfilled all duties, bespoke the thoughts which

mastered her. She and Jim had been drawing nearer through the weeks, a graded progress of lingering, slow-mounting ecstasy. And on one night, one starlight night, Beth and her lover came to a complete understanding.

Jim begged her to go with him to the beach. He was trembling a little himself, being genuinely inspired with a feeling above his own capacity to retain long; she felt the tremor in his voice as he asked the favour. "Let's get away from here," he said. "I want to speak with you."

So they went down to the beach, silent, so absorbed by what was coming that the touch of each other as they jostled in the darkness was enough to make them start. Jim had chosen where the proposal should be made, a nook beneath a bank where they had often sat by moonlight; but this was starlight, and no one was to see.

They sat beneath the bank; the dry sand made a soft seat, the breath of the salt-water quickened their spirits, the lapping of little waves spoke to them with a murmur of far away things. Their two hearts beat like four; Beth felt that she was breathless, Jim knew that he was wordless, and a long pause followed their arrival. At last Jim found that he could speak.

"How quiet it is!"

"And how lovely!"

He felt that this was mere temporising. "We've sat here a good many times," he began again. "Haven't we, Beth?"

"Yes," she murmured, feeling that it was coming.

"I—it's been great fun to see so much of you," he went on, "but it's got to come to an end before long."

"Really?" asked Beth weakly, all natural power of response completely lost.

"It's too much to stand, you know," asserted Jim. "I've—you've made me greedy, Beth. Either I want it all, or none at all."

She answered nothing, though he listened. Ah, it was a mistake to propose in the dark, for he lost the sight of her sweet face.

"Either to come, I mean," he went on again, "whenever I want, or never again, Beth."

"Jim!" she murmured.

"Shall I go away?" he asked. "Or shall we just go on meeting—every day—forever—till death do us part?" he concluded, satisfied that he had expressed the immutability of his sentiments. Getting no answer, he reached for Beth's hands in the darkness, and found the little fluttering things just coming toward him. Then he enfolded her and drew her to him, and what was said after that was too broken to be set down in type.

Thus was accomplished, and very creditably to Jim, the understanding which had been long in coming, and Beth whispered to him the wonderful words, "I love you!" Her little cup was more than full; her happiness overflowed her heart and found a somewhat larger receptacle waiting for it, namely her mind, in which it seemed somewhat thin. Even as she yielded herself to Wayne's embrace Beth's two natures declared themselves not in accord, now when the test was applied. Kisses were strangely fleshly things; Beth shrank beneath Jim's eagerness; poetry vanished before the fierceness of his embrace. This was not a communion of spirit with spirit; Jim did not speak with fervour of his relief from his trials and his fears. The tremolo of praise which her heart was prepared to utter found no response in his; the deeper thoughts were hers alone. She had thought admission to the treasures of Jim's

mind would mean so much, and now his exultation oppressed her, while she winced beneath his physical delight.

Thus Beth, who had thought to sit hand in hand in deep communion, discovered that there was in Jim as man what was lacking in her as woman, and before long she led him home. Jim went with reluctance; it was too sweet to hold and kiss her; she was a morsel far finer than had yet come to him, and he failed to understand her purity, as the farmer's boy cannot comprehend the rebellion of a peach at being eaten.

Nor did Jim quite fall in with Beth's ideas, which she detailed to him as she neared the house. Tell her father and sister, of course, and after that, why not tell everybody else? Beth wished for a month or two of Jim to herself, and to rush into the world flaunting her happiness as if it were an achievement was not in her nature, so she begged of Jim this respite.

"It won't be news to any one by that time," he grumbled.

"But to oblige me, Jim? And really, never again can we have ourselves quite to ourselves." In their walk up the hill Beth had found time to tell herself that she was wrong to be so timid in Jim's embrace; that perhaps it was natural, but that every other girl felt so at first, and the feeling would pass. Thus she meant what she said about having him to herself; and Jim, turning and catching her, declared that there never was a sweeter little thing, that he must have a kiss, and that he would agree.

The Colonel and Judith had been sitting quite stolidly, back to back beside the lamp. But while the Colonel was oblivious to what was going on, Judith had been keenly alive to it. She had recognised the tremor in Jim's voice as he begged for the interview; how many

such requests had been made of her! Yet having always gone to a proposal as a surgeon to an operation, to remove painfully yet kindly the cause of a disease, Judith knew how different her sensations had been from those of Beth, as she went, shrinking, to meet her happiness. During the half-hour that they were away, Judith imagined the bliss of those other two, and knew that however simple it was, it was enviable. Then when Beth returned, Judith started for very joy at the sight of her radiant face.

Very prettily Beth went and kissed her father, and stammered that there was something to tell him, for she and Jim now understood each other. It seemed to Beth natural that Judith should speak slowly, apparently choosing her words—but that the Colonel should wait until Judith had finished speaking, and then should burst out with more than Beth had expected him to say, as if to cover up less than she had expected him to feel, struck cold to Beth's warm little heart, and oppressed much of the remainder of the evening. She had scarcely recovered from it when train-time came, and with it Jim's good-by, almost violent—and the evening was over.

Poor little Beth, kneeling at your bedside, praying for one who, instead of hastening home to tell his mother, stays at the club till after midnight—poor little Beth, a white figure in the pale light of the late-rising moon, go to bed and dream the dreams of yesterday. It would be happier so.

But sleep avoided her. So many thoughts passed through her mind, of the reality which had come to her—a reality like others, hard in places—that Beth lay wakeful. She heard the clock strike eleven, heard her father and Judith come upstairs and say good-night, heard the two go to their rooms. They had said so

little to her, so little, and she was so lonesome! But in a few minutes a door opened, footsteps approached, and Judith stood by her sister's side. Beth stretched up her arms and drew her down.

"Talk to me," Judith murmured. "Tell me about it, about him."

Ah, this was sisterly and sweet! Beth had sometimes thought her sister cold; never would she do so again. She told her happy thoughts, not those vague suggestions of a difficult future or imperfect understanding. Her Jim was such a man! Her own words gave her confidence; clasped in Judith's arms, Beth poured out her hopes; more yet, she spoke of her fears in order to smile them away. She would face hardships, would bear what griefs the world might send, secure in her great love. And Judith, listening, murmured her agreement, her sympathy, her joy.

Then when Judith said good-night, she was held still closer for a moment. "I wish you the same good fortune, dear!" Beth kissed her, and released her.

Beth slept at last; it was Judith who was wakeful. The same good fortune?

Judith mused upon love. It was love which so blinded Beth's eyes and brought this ineffable happiness. Poor Beth! Yet Judith did not even smile with pity, for her nature told her that this love of Beth's, should it but last, would be more of a help, a guide and strength, than all of Judith's own knowledge. And repeating Beth's words, "the same good fortune," Judith wished for that happiness to come to her. To love a man, to believe in him, give herself to him: that would solve the problem of a future which often seemed too cold.

She recognised perfectly the drift of her feelings toward Ellis. Yet her enthusiasm for him was an impulse of the head rather than the heart; it was not a

passion, but a state of mind. How much finer was Beth's perfect self-forgetfulness! And fearing that Ellis could never rouse her to a greater height than this intellectual approval, Judith's thoughts turned regretfully toward Mather. In all the years of their acquaintance, why had he never *made* her love him? Well, that was past! But Judith, softened by this contact with Beth's happiness, and perceiving that the fascination of Ellis's personality was slowly growing on her, looked with regret upon the prospect of a merely rational union.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. PEASE INTRUDES UPON A SECRET

THE summer passed; through October the city gathered its own to itself again. The stay-at-homes, such as Miss Cynthia and Mrs. Wayne, saw with relief shutters go down and blinds open, saw awnings spread over southern windows and children playing on lawns. Poor Mrs. Wayne, threatened with the loss of her treasure, could call less formally upon her daughter-in-law-to-be, yet could not quite reconcile herself with matters as they stood. But that is the way of mothers. Jim began to urge that the engagement be announced, but Beth put him off for another little while.

And now Pease found comfort in the thought of Beth's return, since it would give him his innocent pleasure without journeys or the neglect of business. His winter clothes were chosen with unusual care, nor did he this time repel the tailor's semi-annual attempt to give him a more youthful appearance. At his home Pease became a new man, and Miss Cynthia sneered as she fastened the charge upon him.

"More colour in your neckties!" she sniffed disdainfully.

He smiled, untroubled. "Yes; they tell me it's to be quite proper, this fall."

Astonishment prevented her from speaking; never before had he deserted the middle ground of fashion. Thus the lighter shade of his new overcoat was a sign, his wearing of tan shoes a portent. And his very car-

riage was different, as of a man who has at last found the spring of youth and drinks of it daily. His mannerisms were softening, he took more interest in social news, and an undercurrent of thought always swayed his mind in the direction where knowledge or imagination placed Beth Blanchard.

There was stupidity in Pease, for he did not find the meaning of the existence of Jim Wayne. But very slowly he discovered the reason for his own sensations. He met Beth first in April; by the middle of the summer he knew that she attracted him extremely; a month later he acknowledged that he was going to Chebasset for the sake of seeing her; upon her return to Stirling he felt continual odd thoracic sensations which seemed to make him a living compass, pointing always to Beth. After a fortnight of this sort of thing he waked one day from a reverie of her, to realise that he loved her. The discovery affected him with vertigo; he had to seek the air and think the matter over. In about a week he became familiar with the situation and accepted it. He paused one evening before his motto from Goethe, and smiled to think that he had once considered the end of happiness to be mere culture.

Loving Beth, he did not at first include her in his hopes. There was such delight in contemplating a definite image in absence, such satisfaction in watching Beth herself when present, that for some time he went no further. He made it clear to Beth that he was always willing to attempt anything she desired, and then from time to time looked in on her and adored. Yet the humanising process eventually proceeded. Gazing at his idol until its every perfection was known to him, at last there came the question: Why not possess it? And this worked on him so that in the end he became extremely determined.

So gentle was the increase of his attentions that Beth did not at first take the alarm. At home, no abstraction betrayed him to Miss Cynthia, who thought that he had resigned himself. He was more lively, normal than ever before, and only Mather suspected in him the determination to do or die. The change of the scene of operations from Chebasset to the city, however, gave Mather no chance to keep abreast of the march of events, since the manager still spent most of his days and nights at the seaside. Thus no one enlightened Pease until it became Beth's task to do so herself.

He dressed himself with unusual care one afternoon; had it been the evening Miss Cynthia would never have suspected. But his newest suit, his freshest gloves, the box of violets in his hand, and (more than all) the single pink in his lapel—all these for a moment made her suspect the truth as she watched him leave the house. "Whatever is the man——?" But he was gone, and there was nothing to be done.

He found Beth at home, and gave her the box of violets. She thanked him with such prettiness as always charmed him, such warmth as always made him glow. The poor man tried now to say words of love, he who had never practised them even to himself. It was a long way round, through the weather, the news, the latest invitation, to the deepest emotion of the human heart. But he pointed straight to it at last, and Beth understood.

So she sprang to head him off in the kindest, surest way. "I——" she hesitated with heightened colour, "I have something to tell you, Mr. Pease. Almost nobody knows it [almost everybody was nearer the truth, as Jim weekly complained], but you have been such a good friend that I think I should like you to know."

"You are very kind," he answered, much pleased, and opening his bosom to the fatal dart. "I will tell no one without your permission."

"I should like you to tell your cousin," she said. "I—I——" Her face became scarlet. "Mr. Pease, I am engaged to marry Mr. Wayne."

Down fell his house of cards; it seemed as if the chambers of his brain resounded, and for a moment his head bowed low. Then he raised it again and looked at her, and for the merest instant she saw a face of misery.

"Oh, Mr. Pease," she cried, "I am so sorry!"

There was a moment of stupid silence. "I—I regret," he said at length, "to distress you, by letting you know."

"How can I help knowing?" she answered simply. He sat dumb while she, twisting her fingers in and out, sought for further words. "If I," she said at last with tears in her eyes, "if I have hurt you, I hope that you will blame me, and forget me."

"Blame?" he cried. "And forget? No, no!" She saw his face light nobly. "Miss Blanchard, you have given me new ideals—humanised me. Blame and forget? Why, my life was small and narrow; you have led me out of myself! Everything is better through knowing you. Therefore, I may say with a cheerful heart [and he drew in his breath]:

"Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all!"

He sat upright and smiled, but tears stood in her eyes; she could make no response. After a moment he asked her: "You are to be married soon?"

"No," she answered, and gained command of herself. "We must wait a while—and you know it is very slow, rising in Mr. Wayne's business."

"Yes." Then he rose and held out his hand; she gave him hers at once. "I will go," he said. "Do not reproach yourself, and—God bless you always!" He bent and kissed her hand, smiled again, and then was gone.

She sat down, miserable. Not his brave cheerfulness, nor his almost comic quoting of the old-fashioned couplet, could drive from her the knowledge that his heart was bleeding. Slowly the tears welled out upon her cheeks.

Then Wayne entered joyously. "I passed old Pease on the steps, and he didn't see me. What's wrong with him?"

She ran to him. "Oh, Jim!" she cried, and clung to him, weeping.

"Oho! Indeed?" he exclaimed, and horrified her by loud laughter.

Pease had not noticed whom he passed upon the steps. For a moment after leaving the house he had stood in the vestibule, looking at the setting sun. One would have said that its splendour passed into his face and illumined it; indeed, a glory entered him at that moment, an ecstasy of self-forgetfulness. The sunset faded quickly, but the inner light still shone on his face as he went homeward.

Miss Cynthia saw it when he entered the parlour where she was sitting. Her cousin had never appeared so to her before, and for a moment she mistook. "Is it possible?" she asked herself.

"Cynthia," he said quietly, "Miss Beth Blanchard asked me to tell you that she is to marry Mr. Wayne."

"No!" she cried, angry at once, her love for her cousin blazing in her eyes. "She mustn't!" Then she was ashamed, for he answered gently:

"It seems to me a very happy fortune."

But he could say no more, for a single dry sob burst from her. Fearing to lose his own self-command, he went up to his room.

From that minute Miss Cynthia's admiration of her cousin, which for some time had been passive, recommenced to grow, expanding far beyond its former boundaries as she found what further depths there were in his character. Never, even in their early days of struggle, had he been so considerate, kind, and wise. Indeed, on the very day after his great disappointment he proved his manliness.

Pease travelled down to Chebasset and found Mather in the office as usual. The manager greeted him with an inward pity, for in the morning's mail he had received a letter from Beth, informing her dear George, whom she had always regarded as one of her best friends, that she and Mr. Wayne—etcetera, etcetera. With sorrow for Pease, therefore, Mather greeted him, to be surprised by the banker's smile. When his errand was announced Mather was surprised the more.

"You have been saying, haven't you," asked Pease, "that you must soon have an assistant here, to take charge of the mill while you are in the city."

"Yes," Mather answered. "We are running smoothly now, and my hands are more than full, taking care of both making and selling. I must be in the city all the time, so soon as I can find a capable man to take my place here."

"I have found him," announced Pease, beaming. "James Wayne!"

"I said a *capable* man, Mr. Pease," replied Mather. "The boy is green and flighty."

"Yes, I know," said Pease. "But isn't he worth the trial?"

Mather rose and began to pace the office. Did he dare

trust anything in Jim's hands? "You promised me," he reminded, "that I should have full control over the business."

"So you shall, so you shall," soothed Pease. "But a trial? Come, now!"

Between respect for his employer, affection for Beth, and interest in Wayne himself, Mather saw that he was caught. "You're too good for words!" he said, and yielded.

So the position was offered to Jim, and gave Beth a happy opening to her engagement. Amid all the presents which, according to the custom that ignores the chance of a broken betrothal, came pouring in, nothing pleased Beth so much as the fact that now it was open to her Jim to make his way in the world.

CHAPTER XV

WHICH DEVELOPS THE COLONEL'S FINANCIAL STRATEGY

To Judith Blanchard the publication of her sister's engagement was an experience. Hourly Beth came to show a new letter or present, and with head at Judith's shoulder sighed because people were so kind. Whenever this happened, the image of Mather grew a little clearer in Judith's heart, and that of Ellis so much less distinct. At the same time there rose in Judith a dread of those vague misfortunes which Jim might bring on Beth, and when one evening Ellis came to call, he found Judith inspired with a desire to protect her sister against knowledge of the real hard-heartedness of the world.

"Your sister is very happy," he said after glancing at the table on which the presents were displayed. "May she always remain so!"

Judith turned on him with a curious energy. "You think she may not?"

"I hope she may," was all he would reply.

Judith studied him for a moment, then her eyes softened. "I am very fond of Beth," she said. "We all know Jim; among us we must teach him to be more of a man."

She spoke simply, but her words moved Ellis; her assumption that he was capable of human, domestic feeling almost roused it in him, and as at their first meeting he felt that she could make him better than himself. With the mist of sisterly affection shed upon her eyes, Judith was sweeter than he had ever known

her; yet at the same time a knowledge of her priceless-ness came to him, and he feared this softer side of her as the one on which she would be strongest in defense: it was Mather's side. The sole feelings which Ellis knew himself capable of rousing in her were ambition and the admiration of great things; he felt that he must keep them constantly before her.

"I have some news for you," he said. And so he found himself safely in the back parlour just as the door-bell rang for another visitor.

It was Mather who came; Beth met him with thanks for the roses he had sent, perishable signs of good wishes. Jim had grumbled at the flowers: "Why doesn't he send something practical?" But Beth had been delighted, and now told Mather so, calling Wayne to her side to echo her words. Next she spoke with still deeper gratitude, alluding to the position which had been given Jim.

"And you are glad," Mather asked, "because after this you can't see so much of him?"

"Ah," Beth replied shyly, "we shall the sooner be able to see each other all the time."

"But don't thank me," Mather continued. "It was Pease's idea. Thank me if Jim *keeps* his place." He nodded at the young man with a meaning which was not exactly jovial, and which Jim (being like others of his age, half-loutish and half-assertive) resented accordingly. So Jim got himself away, to talk aimless commonplaces with the next visitor, Pease, and to glare at Mather as he still spoke with Beth.

"He's prepared to be a father to me," Jim grumbled, for, in the business talk already held, Mather had laid down application and steadiness as requisites. Jim had taken the warning indifferently, whence the renewed hint, purposely given for Beth's benefit, as Jim

appreciated. "Now," he thought, "she'll rub it into me."

Meanwhile Mather and Beth spoke of matrimony, and exchanged conventionalities while they struggled with deep thoughts. They felt that they understood each other; besides, each had at the same time a regret for the other's fate. Thus Beth, with her knowledge of Ellis in the back parlour, pitied Mather, who in his turn grieved that Jim's weaknesses were unknown to Beth. But being genuinely sympathetic, Mather and Beth felt the thrill of their friendship, and were more closely drawn together by this belief in each other's impending unhappiness. Therefore, though for a time they spoke in a lighter vein, at last their feeling came to the surface. Mather had described marriage and its inconveniences, as seen from the bachelor's standpoint. "I am not afraid!" declared Beth with a toss of the head. Then with an impulse he took her hands.

"We know that troubles may come, however lucky we may seem, don't we, Beth?" he said. "Look here, if ever you need any help, you'll remember me, won't you?"

And Beth, instead of retorting that she had her father and Jim to rely on, for the moment forgot those sturdy protectors, and promised that she would. Beth was at this time always on the edge of emotional gratitude, and there was a glimmer of tears in her affectionate eyes as she answered. Then the Colonel came wandering into the room, at the same time as the voices of Judith and Ellis were heard at the door of the back parlour, and Beth and Mather separated. Jim drew her aside at once.

"Why did you hold hands with him so?" he asked.

"He's one of the oldest friends I have," she replied in surprise. "And I'm so sorry for him, Jim!" She

led him to the window recess, and tried to interest her lover in Mather's mournful fate, but Jim did not enter into her sorrow to the degree which she anticipated. Then that happened which Mather had desired and Jim dreaded, for Beth spoke of the position at the mill: he mustn't lose it. "You will work hard, won't you, Jim dear?"

"Do you suppose I shan't?" he demanded testily. Whereby he put Beth in the wrong, so that she repressed a sigh, and begged his pardon.

Now while Jim, after this triumph, assumed a sulky dignity which was quite appropriate, the Colonel was still wandering, mentally at least, if the quality of his words with Mather and Pease was a sign. "Wool-gathering," decided Mather, and relapsed into silence while the Colonel explained to Pease that the peculiar actions of the autumn weather were—ha, peculiar, and how were matters with Mr. Pease? Then the Colonel did not listen, and started when the answer was innocently ended with a question. Vaguely, he said he didn't know.

"In my business," went on Pease, apparently satisfied, "the state of the stock market occasions considerable vigilance. One does not seem able even to guess what will happen."

"No," acquiesced the Colonel, this time with an attention which the fervour of his tone attested. "That is very true."

Unhappily true, he might have said without exaggeration. Indeed, were life an opera, and had each person his *leit-motif*, the Colonel would have taken wherever he went an undertone of jarring excitement. The cymbals would best express the clashing of his hopes and fears; he rose in the night to figure on bits of paper, read the news feverishly each evening, and roused

Judith's criticism of his tendency to carry away the stock-market reports. Judith was watching those stocks in which Ellis was interested, but while her concern was merely in the theory of market manipulation, the Colonel's was sadly practical.

And it was on his mind this night that he was near an end; his life's opera was approaching that grand crash when the cymbals were to be drowned by the heavier brasses. In his pocket were barely two hundred dollars in cash, he had placed his last thousand at the broker's, and the broker had sent word that he must have another in the morning. The Colonel looked at his daughters, Beth sweet and Judith proud; he looked at Pease and Ellis, safe from calamity; he looked at Jim with his youth and Mather with his strength. None of them had troubles; he alone was miserable.

And the Colonel, when he could withdraw, went into a corner and brooded over his ill-luck, thus alone, of all the company, failing to remark the special brilliancy of Judith's beauty. Ellis saw it and was proud, for he had caused it; Mather noted it and groaned, for it was not for him; Beth admired; Jim came out of his sulk, swaggered, and made up to her; even Pease was roused to a mild admiration. And Judith herself felt as if she had moved the world a foot from its orbit.

Ellis's news had been important. "Do you remember the advice you gave me?" he had inquired when the two were alone in the little parlour.

"About the corporation lawyer?" she asked eagerly. "Of course! Tell me, have you done anything with him?"

"Anything? Everything!" he responded with enthusiasm. "That magazine told all about him, and I looked him up in New York. He came on here—I don't know how I should have put it through without him."

"Then you have managed it?" she asked.

Indeed he had, he assured her. A man gets—well, misjudged by others, sometimes; there had been a prejudice to overcome before he could affect this consolidation. The others had been unusually shy; the safeguards Ellis offered had not satisfied them. But the lawyer had straightened matters out so that all had gone smoothly, and he, Ellis, had saved money by his means.

"Good!" cried Judith.

"We paid him twenty-five," Ellis said.

"Twenty-five?"

"Thousand," he explained.

"So much?" cried Judith.

"Oh," answered Ellis, "it was no great affair for him. He often gets much more."

Judith was speechless.

"And," said Ellis, "there is some one else we ought to fee, if only it were possible. But I scarcely see how I could bring her name before the directors."

"A woman?" she asked, much excited.

"You," he replied briefly, and his mouth shut with its customary firmness. But his eyes noted her exhilaration.

"I?" she demanded. "I? Do you mean that what I said was of importance?"

"You have saved us time. You have put money directly in my pocket. Ten thousand is what I calculate I've saved in concessions, and in the time gained by shortening trouble I reckon I've made as much more." He laughed. "What percentage shall I give you?"

But she would not jest. "You're welcome, welcome!" she exclaimed. "I'm satisfied, just to feel that I have

been a factor. Just to know that I—oh, Mr. Ellis, you can't know how I feel!"

And Judith was near the danger line at that moment, as she leaned toward him with sparkling eyes. He saw it, believed his chance had come, and sought to take advantage of it. "I shall consult you always after this," he said. "I will bring you all my difficulties. A partnership—what do you say to that?"

She laughed in deprecation, yet she was flattered, and the stimulus caused her to rear her head and expand her nostrils in the way she had. In his turn he was thrilled, and fire entered his veins.

"What do you say?" he repeated, leaning toward her. "Shall we be partners?"

"A silent partnership?" she asked. "Or will you put up the sign, Ellis and Blanchard?"

The answer sprang to his lips, but he checked it, wondering if he dared venture. A glance at her face decided him; she was looking, still with those triumphant eyes, away from him, as if she saw visions of success. He spoke hoarsely.

"Not Ellis and Blanchard, but—Ellis and Ellis!"

She looked at him. "What did you say?" she asked absently, as if her thoughts had been elsewhere. Then, looking where her glance had been, he saw Mather in the farther room. Mather—and she had not heard!

"I said nothing," he answered, almost choking.

Even his discomfiture escaped her, and presently she took him to the others. Her excitement was not gone, it made her wonderfully beautiful, but though he might triumph that he had caused it, he knew that she had slipped away from him. He tried in vain to master his exasperation.

Judith's thoughts were of Mather; she felt that if she could tell him what she had done, she would crush him.

This was what she had hoped for: the time when she should prove that she could influence events. He had said the world would be too much for her! Perhaps now she could break that masterfulness against which she had always rebelled. And she smiled at the quiet assurance of his manner, for he had merely started a mill and built up a business, while she had all but created a Trust! It would humble him, if he but knew.

There is no need of describing the next half-hour's doings of that mixed company. Pride and sweetness, loutishness, strength, amiability, ambition, and a feeble man's weak despair, all were together in the Blanchard's parlour, and got on very badly. It is enough to say that Judith talked with Mather, looking at him from time to time with a gleam of unexpressed thought which he did not understand; that Ellis, trying to subdue a grin of fury into a suave smile, put his hands in his pockets and clenched them there; and that by this action he exposed, protruding from his vest pocket, the end of a narrow red book at which the Colonel was presently staring as if fascinated.

Now the Colonel had once been, as already stated, what the early Victorians were fond of calling a man of substance. Hence complacency to the exclusion of persistence, and a later life dominated by the achievements of youth. He ran away from college to go to the Civil War, and at the coming of peace retired on his laurels. Arduous service in the State militia brought him his title; he married, travelled, and frittered away the years until changes in the value of property brought him face to face with what might seem the unavoidable choice, either to accommodate himself to a more modest establishment, or to go to work to earn money.

Out of the seeming deadlock the Colonel's financial insight found a way. His capital, used as income, for

some years more maintained him in the necessary way of life. Meanwhile he promised himself to regain his money by the simple means of the stock market, but when he came to apply the remedy, some perverseness in its workings made it fail, and to his astonishment he found himself at the end of his resources. To none of his friends might he turn for relief, for your friend who lends also lectures, and the Colonel could never bear that. Our esteemed warrior was, however, still fertile in resource, and his genius discovered a possible base of supplies. Hence the fascination exerted by the check-book which Ellis always carried about with him.

Some moralists might dub the Colonel weak for dwelling on this contemplation. Yet consistency is regarded as a virtue, and the Colonel was usually consistent in trying to get what he wanted. With his military eye still fixed on the end of the narrow red book, he drew near to Ellis and began to speak with him. Naturally, that which was in the Colonel's mind came first to his lips.

"The stock market has been flighty lately," quoth he.

So were girls, thought Ellis. "Very flighty," he said. "But that scarcely concerns you, I hope."

"Oh, no, no!" the Colonel hastily assured him. "And yet—Mr. Ellis, may I have a word with you in my study?"

Accustomed though he was to every turn of fortune, Ellis's heart leaped. Was the fool coming into his hands at last? Then, as he looked once more at Judith, the unduly sensitive organ made the reverse movement, contracting with a spasm of real pain. She was not even noticing him now. He followed the worthy Colonel to what was called his study.

Blanchard had no moral struggle to make before he

broached his subject. His fibre had degenerated long ago; his sole feeling was regret that he must expose himself to one who was below his station. Taking care, therefore, not to lower himself in his own eyes by subservience in word or manner, the Colonel indicated his need of a few thousands, "just to tide him over." He wondered if Ellis were willing to advance the money.

Ellis took the request quietly, and sat as if thinking. His cold face concealed a disturbance within: elation struggling with an unforeseen doubt. This collapse on the Colonel's part Ellis had watched and hoped for, yet now that it had come a dormant instinct stirred, questioning whether to control Judith by such means were not unworthy of himself. A man was fair game, but a woman—Ellis roused himself impatiently. Entirely unaccustomed to making moral decisions, he could not see that he stood at the parting of ways, and that from the moment when he leagued himself with the Colonel, deceit entered into his relations with Judith. Intolerant of what seemed a weakness, he crushed down the doubt. What was he dreaming of? The chance was too good to be lost.

Need of appearing businesslike made him ask a few questions. "What security can you offer?"

"Nothing whatever," answered the Colonel, grandly simple.

"This house?" asked Ellis.

"Twice mortgaged, and," added the Colonel as if the joke were upon his mortgagees, "out of repair."

Ellis took note of the admission; if the mortgagees knew that the house were in poor condition, they might sell cheap. "The house at Chebasset?" he inquired.

"Merely rented."

"No stocks or bonds, no other property?" Ellis persisted.

"My furniture," was all the Colonel could suggest.

This time a real repugnance seized Ellis. "Nothing of that kind," he answered sharply, feeling that to have a lien on the very chair which Judith sat in was too much. Yet the thought of her, thus again brought in, grew in spite of this spasm of right feeling, and even while he despised the Colonel for his unmanliness, his own lower nature spoke. "There is one other thing, however."

The Colonel saw his meaning. "Mr. Ellis," he cried, with fine indignation, "I mean to repay you every cent!"

But the eye of the warrior fell before that of the parvenu. "Cur!" thought Ellis. "Damn your small spirit!" Nevertheless, he drew out his check-book. "You will give your note, of course?"

"Of course!" replied the Colonel with dignity. Two documents changed hands, one in fact, the other by courtesy representing the value of five thousand dollars. Then Ellis refused the Colonel's invitation to stay and smoke; the transaction tasted badly in his mouth.

"But at least you will come into the parlour again," said the Colonel, when they were once more in the front hall. Ellis stood without replying, and the Colonel waited while he looked in at the others.

Pease had gone, the other four remained, and Mather was the center of the group. Wayne was regarding him resentfully, Beth affectionately, Judith unfathomably. She still remembered the news which Ellis had brought.

"So you are glad to be a city man again?" asked Beth of Mather.

"Yes," he replied, "but poor Jim!"

"Poor Jim!" echoed Beth tenderly.

"He can stand it," testily rejoined the object of their sympathy.

"I don't know that I shall feel at home here, after being a countryman so long," said Mather. "Will you tell me all that has happened down-town in my absence, Judith?"

Without answering, she threw him a glance, meaning that she could—if she would! In the hall Ellis turned abruptly away, and gathered up his hat and coat.

"No, I won't come in," he said to the Colonel, and went away at once.

His hold on Blanchard, now that it was gained, seemed unaccountably small. It would grow, Ellis had no doubt of that, for the Colonel was on the road down hill; and yet the relationship promised less than it might. For though by this means Ellis might win possession of Judith, he wanted more than that; he must have her esteem. And Mather had taken her mind from him! Ellis grew hot and cold with that strange feeling whose name he could not discover, while yet its disturbances were stronger from day to day.

For the Colonel another act of his opera began with a pleasant jig; cheered, he retired to his study, and began to plan how to double Ellis's note. Jim took Beth away into the back parlour, where presently the light grew dim. As the two went, Judith saw Beth's upward glance into her lover's face, and her own thoughts changed and grew soft; she turned to watch Mather as he sat before what had been, earlier in the evening, a wood fire.

She noticed how natural it seemed for him to gather the embers together, put on wood from the basket, and start a little blaze. The action first carried her back to the period before he was her declared lover; next it drew her thoughts forward to a time when he might be—what Jim was to Beth. And Mather, unconsciously

working at the fire, started for Judith a train of musing.

Beth had taught her that to love was enviable, and that it might be a relief to have one's future fixed. Sitting thus with Mather, it seemed to Judith that just so must many a husband and wife be sitting, contented and at home. When compared with the restless dissatisfaction which so long had tormented her, the picture was alluring. Judith gave herself to the mood.

Mather toyed with the tongs for a minute longer, then gave the logs a final tap into place, and turned to her as if rousing from thought. "It's pleasant to be here," he said, "and it's fine to be in the city. I like to meet people on the street again. It's as if I had had years of exile."

She smiled without replying, and he went on. "I think it's done me good. Curious, isn't it, that to be knocked down and kicked out, and then to go away and look at people through a telescope, should be a real benefit? But I've gained a better perspective than before; I've had time to think of the theory as well as the practice of affairs. Yes, it's been healthful—but it's good to be back. You understand what I mean, don't you, Judith?"

"I do," she answered. Ellis was forgotten; here was George speaking as he had not spoken for a year, of his ideas and experiences. She was glad to have them brought to her, glad that he spoke freely and not bitterly, and again the remembrance of Beth's happiness brought a vision of closer relationship.

He noted the softness of her mood, and without effort let the time drift on, careful only not to disturb this harmony, until at last he felt that the talk should be stopped before it ended of itself, and so he took his leave.

She gave him one of her direct looks as she offered her hand. "You have been too busy, George," she said. "Come oftener." With the firm hand-clasp to express the undercurrent of their thoughts, they parted. Alone again by the fire, Judith indulged herself by looking forward. One could drift into marriage, easily and agreeably.

Then she heard Jim say good-night, and Beth came and leaned upon her chair. "I want to tell you what Mr. Fenno said to me this afternoon," said Beth. "About George and the new combination of the cotton millers."

"What had George to do with that?" asked Judith.

"The Wampum Mills held out a long while," answered Beth; "the whole thing depended upon them. Mr. Fenno is president; George is a director, but he sent in his resignation soon after he went to Chebasset, and didn't attend their meetings for weeks."

"Well?" asked Judith.

"Well, the directors couldn't make up their minds, and at last they refused to accept George's resignation, and sent for him. He looked into the matter, and then he——" Beth paused to laugh.

"Go on," begged Judith.

"He scolded them for not jumping at the chance. Mr. Fenno said he hadn't been so lectured since he was a boy; he was much pleased by it. So the Wampum Mills went into the combination three days ago, all of the little mills followed at once, and they expect to do almost double business now. Isn't it fine of George?"

"Fine!" agreed Judith, but her gentler mood was destroyed. Ellis also had had part in the combination, the greater part. If one were to compare the achievements and to choose between the men, if one were to do rather than to dream——! She threw off her thoughts

of Mather as one throws off a cloak and looks upon it lying shapeless. Life and action suddenly called her again; she, too, had influenced this matter. She remembered Ellis's acknowledgment of indebtedness, the suggestion of partnership, and the compliment pleased her. Mather passed completely from her mind, and Ellis dominated her as before.

CHAPTER XVI

SOMETHING NEW

IF Mrs. Harmon's marriage was her most brilliant success, it was also her greatest disappointment—as it was her husband's. At times when she thought of her position, she was satisfied; when she realised its restraints she rebelled. For she was robust, full-blooded, stirring, but the Judge was “set in his ways.” He was mental, she was physical; as a result she completely misprized him.

He had brought her into a circle where she did not belong; it was as if a gardener had set among roses some hardy, showy plant, a flaunting weed. Pleased as Mrs. Harmon was, her position irked her to maintain; respectability was often very wearisome, very flat. There was little spice and go to life; too much restraint was required. Not entirely vulgar, not exactly coarse, she fretted first, then yearned for other things. Barbaric is the word that fits her best; she was like the educated Indian who longs for his free dress and freer ways.

Liberty was out of the question, since she would never give up the brilliance of her position. Personal freedom she had; for the Judge, when he found that she could not be the companion that he hoped, gave her all the money that he could, and let her (within bounds which she understood very well and overstepped only in secret) do as she pleased. But she had in her the craving for physical stimuli; earth was her mother. A five-mile walk daily might have kept her mind clear,

yet she would have had to walk alone, and that was unbearable. Loving people, she lacked companionship, for with women below her station she would not chum, while with those in it she could not. We have seen how Judith failed her; there remained only the men. Handsome and shrewd, Mrs. Harmon had gained her position without yielding to their snares; but now that the dangers which beset her single life were past, she began to look back at them inquiringly. Her beauty was full-blown; soon it would begin to fade, and her nature cried out against losing youth and all its pleasures.

Her feelings were from instinct, not calculation; her actions were impulsive. When she first met Ellis, quite unconsciously her thoughts had dwelt on him. He was unresponsive; the two dropped into a habit of semi-intimacy, but having thus begun to let her fancy roam, Mrs. Harmon yearned for an Adonis until her dreams centered with some constancy upon a vision which answered to the name of Jim.

Circumstances are everything; there is nothing human which does not depend upon them absolutely, and Mrs. Harmon might have "sighed and pined and ogled" forever, had not Wayne been thrown in her path at a time when his mind was ready to welcome diversion.

It happened that he had planned to go to the theater with Beth. They wanted to go alone, therefore they must go in the afternoon. He chose a Wednesday, though only Saturday afternoons belonged to him. The play was advertised in a manner to excite Jim's interest, and he assured Beth it would be "bully." Coming up from Chebasset at eleven o'clock, he dressed himself in his best and lunched at the Blanchard's. Then as the hour approached he started with Beth for the temple of amusement.

She pressed his arm as they stood for a minute in the vestibule. "Naughty boy!" she said, beaming on him. "Naughty to spend so much money on me!"

"We mustn't dry up, Beth," he answered. "Life's too serious to have no fun in it."

"But to take an afternoon from work!" she said, so prettily that only conscience would have blinded him to the intended thanks. Jim's sense of guilt, however, made him start.

"Confound it, Beth," he cried, stopping short and looking at her, "don't you trust me to take an afternoon off without stealing it?"

"Oh, oh!" she exclaimed. "Jim, I didn't mean that!" She tried to soothe his irritation away, but it was a bad beginning to their pleasure, and they could not talk freely on the way to the theater. When they entered the lobby she felt that he was still touchy, therefore she said nothing of the flaming posters which she saw now for the first time. Women in tights, drunken men—but Jim had said the play would be fine; these were only to catch the passer's eye.

Jim unbent again when they were once seated: the curtain, the bustle, the anticipation pleased him. "It's going to be great!" he said. "It's fun to be together, isn't it, Beth?" He was as loving as before, and her little heart was happy.

But when the curtain went up, and the play commenced, poor Beth began to sicken. Women with tights appeared, and said unpleasant things; the drunken man came on, and reeled about horribly. Besides these attractions there were two people who gave a travesty of lovers, at which Jim nudged her; there was a woman who drank beer, and a waiter who spilled it down her neck. At this last whimsical situation the theater rocked with laughter, so that Beth became aware that

there were people who liked that sort of thing; next she saw that Jim at her side was weak with merriment at the exquisite foolery. The curtain went down to a song which the audience regarded as deliciously droll, but at which Beth rose from her seat, her cheeks flaming.

"What is it?" asked Jim, astonished.

"I must go home," she answered. "Come."

While the curtain was going up again that the singer might be complimented, Beth and Jim made their way out of the theater. He cast glances behind at the prima donna; Beth looked neither right nor left. But when they were free of the place, he came to her side with anxiety in his face.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"Then what is it?"

"That play, Jim."

"What?" he cried, thunderstruck.

"It was dreadful," she said. "I couldn't bear it."

He could say nothing at first, but at length he tried to speak. "Then the money I've spent—and my time?"

"Don't, Jim!" she pleaded. "Not here in the street."

"Very well," he answered stiffly, and was silent until he reached her house. But when she started up the steps he stood still and raised his hat.

"Jim!" she exclaimed, halting. "Aren't you coming in?"

He backed away and would not look at her. "Later," he said.

"Jim!" she cried appealingly.

He turned and went away without another word, doing what he knew he should repent, for she was very sweet, very piteous. She would have run after him to draw him back but—some one was coming. She went into

the house and sat in tears, waiting for him to return, but he did not come.

Now the person who was coming was Mrs. Harmon, and she saw it all. She perceived the scowl on Jim's face; she almost heard Beth's pleading. On impulse she turned back as if she had forgotten something, and allowed Jim to overtake her.

"Why, Mr. Wayne!" she said, and Jim could not pass without speaking.

"Good-afternoon," he said.

"A very beautiful afternoon," she responded, so that however reluctant, he had to delay. And now is seen the beginning of the afternoon's development, for when she next spoke she had no thought beyond what was expressed by her words. "An afternoon for a walk, Mr. Wayne." She had the very faintest hope that he might offer to walk with her.

"An afternoon for the theater," answered Jim bitterly, as he remembered the delights he had lost. Mrs. Harmon's disappointment was far greater than her expectations.

"Are you going?" she asked him. "What, you have been, Mr. Wayne? But how are you out so early?"

"Some people," answered Jim, "don't care for the theater."

Mrs. Harmon, recalling what she had just seen, did some swift guessing. "My husband, for instance," she said lightly.

"And Miss Blanchard," added Jim gloomily.

She thought she guessed why Jim would not walk with her. "You are going back to see the rest of the performance alone?"

But the idea came to him as new. He took from his pocket two slips of blue cardboard and regarded them

resentfully. "I could go back," he said. "The man gave me these at the door. I've half a mind to."

Two slips of cardboard! A thought came to her, of such weight that she needed time to consider it; therefore she changed the subject. "How do you like your new business?" she asked. "It must be very interesting."

Thus she opened new fields of discontent. "Interesting enough," answered Jim. "But a fellow that has had freedom finds it very confining."

"I can imagine it," she murmured. "And it is a different line of work."

"Quite different," agreed Jim. "Compared with brokering, it's dull, Mrs. Harmon. I miss the excitement; it's awful humdrum at the mill. There's such lots of stupid detail."

"Then Chebasset is so far from the city," she supplemented.

"It is difficult to get any time here," he said, "unless you take an early train, you know." Recollection came to him again, and he added: "And when a fellow makes a special effort to give another person pleasure, and she—well, never mind!" Jim sighed heavily.

Mrs. Harmon made a sympathetic pause. Motives were balanced in Jim's brain just then, resentment and desire for pleasure driving him away from Beth, affection and remorse drawing him back. Had Mrs. Harmon been the deepest of schemers, she could not have thrown her weight more cleverly against Beth's. Seeing that they were approaching a corner, which might separate her from Jim, she thought only to continue the conversation; but behold, she augmented the current of his discontent. "How do you enjoy working under Mr. Mather?" she asked.

The gloom deepened on Jim's face. "Mather's kind

of—oh, well, he expects every one to see things the way he does.”

“I can imagine he’s strict,” she said.

“He’s arbitrary!” answered Jim emphatically.

“It’s too bad!” she responded with sympathy. But they were at the corner, and she stopped. One way led down town, one to quieter neighbourhoods—and this in morals as well as in geography. She meant not to separate from Jim, and yet how to keep him, or go with him? Mere instinct guided her again, and this time she gave herself to it and followed without further thought.

“Well?” she asked, as they stood still.

“Well?” echoed Jim, quite blank, yet seeing she expected him to say something.

“Shall I go one way, or the other?” she demanded.

“One way, or the other?” he repeated stupidly.

“I meant to make calls,” she said, accenting the preterit, “but if you should ask me” (accenting the auxiliary) “to go with you to see the rest of that play——” She made no finish, but cocked her head and looked past him, sidewise.

“Gad!” cried Jim, staring.

“Ah, well!” she sighed, turning away.

“Come on!” he exclaimed. “Come along, Mrs. Harmon. Jove, it will be great fun!”

“Why, I didn’t really mean it,” she replied, but smiling gaily.

She was everything that Beth was not: pronounced, vivacious, multi-coloured. She was handsome, red-cheeked, bright of eye, and if she was a little hard of glance, Jim did not perceive it. She pleased him; he urged her again.

“Well, I can do some shopping,” she said with a teasing accent of reflection, and went down town by his

side. The theater was not far; when they reached it, she made as if to pass on. "Good-bye," she said.

"Oh, Mrs. Harmon!" cried he.

"You really mean you want me to come in?" she asked.

"Of course!" insisted Jim, and lied manfully. "I wanted it all the time."

"I haven't seen this play," she said, reflecting. "My husband never takes me to the theater."

"Then let me," he urged. A strain of music was wafted out as she hesitated. "See, we're losing some."

"How funny," she said, looking at him and smiling, "to go in this way. But it's a lark, isn't it, Mr. Wayne. Come on, then!" She stepped before him to the door, and in a moment they were in the theater together.

There were again the dusk, the rustle, and the music. Some voice beyond the footlights called "*Zwei bier!*" and a laugh followed from the audience. A noiseless usher led the two to their seats, which they took while watching the woman on the stage doubtfully circling away from the waiter who had spilt beer on her before. The second act was not yet finished; there were ten minutes more before the curtain went down, which it did just as the actress turned a somersault, quite modestly. The third act was even more capriciously humorous than the other two.

Mrs. Harmon and Jim enjoyed themselves keenly, the thrill of the unusual companionship adding excitement to the pleasure. At last she was with him; for the first time he was with some one else than Beth. He still had enough resentment against Beth to feel that he was serving her right; he compared her with Mrs. Harmon; he wished Beth were more—well, sensible. Mrs. Harmon displayed an abundance of sense; she saw the good points; jokes that Beth would have missed entirely

were not lost on Mrs. Harmon. When they walked to her house together she spoke most appreciatively of the extravaganza. If Beth could but be thus!

But most of all Jim felt that he pleased a woman. Mrs. Harmon leaned to him at times, put her face near his; he felt her breath; once in the theater her hair touched him. She was sympathetic and confidential; they reached the "you-and-I" stage very quickly. Thus:

"If the Judge were only a little more like you, Mr. Wayne!" This at beginning; then, "I had thought you so stately, Mr. Wayne, but we seem to have just the same tastes." Those tastes were discussed next, putting all the rest of the world on a lower plane, so that "how amusing others are" was a natural conclusion, and Jim realised that he and she were looking upon life as on a spectacle.

In this there was flattery beyond his power to resist; there was, besides, a suggestion too subtle for him to perceive at first. She made it plain that because her husband and she were not congenial, she went with Jim; but for a time the corollary escaped him—that because he had gone with her, therefore he and Beth were not at one. He saw only that he was taking a vacant place, and that she was grateful to him.

At her door Mrs. Harmon looked at him, smiling doubtfully. "I would ask you in, only——"

Jim had grown bold. "Well, why?"

"No, no! It would never do—not after what we have already done. And you will of course not say anything about this, Mr. Wayne?" she added seriously.

Thus the final idea came to him that they two had been near, very near, the border-line of convention. "Not really?" he asked.

"Of course Miss Blanchard, if you wish," she answered.

"Shall I even tell her?" he said, trying to look knowing.

"You bad man!" she murmured, bending to him. "But it has been great fun!" Then she ran up the steps. As Jim walked away he suppressed his gratification, and endeavoured to estimate her character. She was quite different from what people thought her.

That evening he dined with his mother; afterwards he went to the club. But the sense of guilt grew on him, and drove him at last to the Blanchards'. There Beth was still watching for him, so unhappy! She sobbed in his arms, begging his pardon—yes, the poor little thing begged his pardon, and Jim forgave her.

He did not tell her of Mrs. Harmon, nor did he stay late, for he had to travel to Chebasset. It was not of Beth that he thought most in the train. Beth had only called him a naughty boy; Mrs. Harmon said he was a bad man. He felt as if he had been pleasantly wicked, like the fellows in New York or Paris, going about with married women.

CHAPTER XVII

WHICH DEALS WITH SEVERAL OF OUR PERSONAGES

IT is assumed in many fairy tales that the story ends with the engagement, the beginning of which marks the end of trouble. But love, though a solvent of selfishness, works slowly, and the added friction of constant companionship is needed to make its results perfect. Temperament and taste, therefore, during an engagement retain most of their power. Thus it is not surprising that two months were not sufficient to harden Beth Blanchard to the roughness of her lover's embraces; she even found further faults in him.

Of these shadows on his happiness Jim became early aware, and obeying a passion which had not yet lost all its purity or force, he had endeavoured to modify himself to suit the conditions which Beth very gently imposed. He became less anthropophagous, moderating the violence of his kisses; he came very near to estimating the value of her modesty, which formed the essence of her sweetness. But he was already so much of a man that he felt his superiority, and still so much of a boy that he fretted at restraint. To expect him to stay always contented at Beth's side was like asking him to admire Mozart when he had rag-time in his blood. Her dainty harmonies were foreign to him.

One Saturday evening he was at the Blanchards' when Mather came to call. Beth proposed to go into the front parlour and speak to him. Jim objected. "He comes for your sister; and besides, I see enough of him during the week."

But above her friendship for Mather, Beth possessed that spirit of hospitality—old-fashioned, to be sure—which impelled her to greet each visitor that came to the house. Further, she felt that to keep out of sight of all who came, while yet she was within hearing, was not in the best of taste. “But I haven’t seen him for a long time,” she said. “And—I think we’d better go, Jim, if only for a little while.”

“Cut it short, then,” he grumbled, and followed her through the curtains.

“Much of a suitor he is!” thought Jim, as he noticed how gladly Mather rose from Judith’s side and greeted Beth. Perhaps Judith thought the same. There was a wholesome freshness about Beth which often brought men’s eyes to her and kept them there. Jim was usually proud of it; now it irritated him. Moreover, he was left to talk with Judith, and that he had found to be difficult. Therefore, when he had had more than enough of her monosyllables, and felt that he had made a fool of himself in his efforts to entertain her, he tried to break into the talk of the other two. Beth had been speaking of Chebasset.

“A hole!” said Jim, rising and standing by her chair. “An awful hole!”

Mather laughed; Beth gave Jim a distressed little smile. “You did well to get away and leave the work to me,” continued Jim, addressing his superior. He tried, successfully, for the effect of the true word spoken in jest. “Winter coming on, too.”

Mather laughed again. “Jim,” he said, “I went through all that when I was your age, and worked at the machines besides.”

“You see, Jim,” said Beth, “how much further ahead you are than George.”

“Nothing wonderful,” he answered, for her remark

went wrong. So did his own; Mather exchanged a glance with Judith, and Beth shrank. Jim put his arm around her neck. "Well, well," he went on, "let's not talk business."

Beth removed the arm, gently, as she rose. "Yes, we'll forget all that till Monday," she said, and moved toward the door again. "We just came in to say good-evening, George." She and Jim went away, to begin a struggle of temperaments.

"Why did you stay so long there?" he asked at once.

"But Jim," she explained, "a little more makes no real difference, and is so much more polite."

"It makes a difference to me," he retorted, "when I have to talk with your sister. Darn it, you know she and I never get on."

She winced at his expletive, which seemed to hint of something stronger, and so was just as bad. "Don't," she pleaded. "I—I'm sorry about Judith, Jim."

"I might be allowed to say darn sometimes," he complained. "Most men say something worse."

"It's just—manners, Jim," she answered. "And don't you think the way you spoke to George, when so much depends upon him——"

"Look here, Beth," he interrupted, "am I not a fair judge of my own behaviour?"

"I didn't say that, dear!" she cried.

"He needn't give himself such airs, anyway," Jim went on. "Pease is my boss, not Mather."

"Oh, I think you mistake," she said.

"Pease gave me the place," Jim persisted, "because—you know."

The reference hurt poor Beth, to whom the thought of Pease was distress. "Don't speak of it, dear," she begged.

"It's so," asserted Jim. "But you'd think Mather

was my father, from the advice he gave me. Great fun it was, for you to give him another chance at me!"

There was nothing for her except submission. "I'm sorry," she said. But Beth was not meek; she let him see, by tone and manner, that she yielded only because she was overborne. Therefore he gave another thrust to make his conquest sure.

"I'm sorry you don't like my arm about your neck," he said. "Please excuse me for putting it there."

She went close to him. "Only when other people are about," she explained, and put up her face. "You may—kiss me now, Jim, if you want to."

Beth would have been glad even of one of his engulfing embraces, as a sign of reconciliation; but he kissed her gingerly and then sat down, not on the sofa, but on a chair. Next he was surly for a while; then he rose to go.

"I'm tired," he said. "It's been a hard week."

After that lie her sympathy was a reproach. "I'm so sorry," she whispered, caressing him. "If I was cross, forgive me, dear. You do work hard for me." No accusation could have cut deeper; he could scarcely look her in the eyes as he said good-night at the door.

Poor Beth laid her forehead against the dull wood, and listened to his footsteps until they were gone. It worried her that Jim was tired, and that she, not understanding, had been hard on him. She wished her perceptions had been quicker; she resolved to study how to please him. Poor, simple Beth!

Jim, grumbling at his crosses, went homeward, but not home. For the Harmon house was by his way; he saw lights in the lower windows, and he loitered. Next, he went and rang the bell. He was shown into the parlour, into a new atmosphere, for Mrs. Harmon rose with evident gladness from her book, and her very

greeting changed his mood. The Judge was in his study; should she call him? Jim took his cue from the flash of her eye. "No, no!" he cried, and they laughed together.

And as he sat and looked at her—what a difference! There was fullness of good looks in the face, far more pronounced than Beth's; the shoulder was plump, the arm firm and pink. Beth never showed such attractions as these, having the feeling that modesty became a girl. But though Mrs. Harmon was no longer young, "Gad!" thought Jim, "if girls only knew as much as women!" Mrs. Harmon brought cigarettes; she joked him as a man would. Jolly, this was!

Jim took a cigarette from the case she offered. "You're sure you don't mind the smoke?" he asked.

"I? Mind the smoke?" she returned. "I like it so much that—what do you think of my box?" She closed the cigarette-case and showed him its cover, standing by his side as he sat.

"Swell!" said Jim. "Those Cupids with masks are simply slap! Whose initials, Mrs. Harmon? Yours?" He laughed.

"Why not mine?" she asked.

"L. H.," read Jim. "L. is the Judge's initial, I know."

"My name is Lydia," she said. "And my husband's name is Abiel, Mr. Wayne."

Jim rose hastily. "Then this is really your case, Mrs. Harmon. And do you—will you—smoke with me?"

"Of course I will!" she cried.

Jim felt himself very much indeed like those fellows in New York or Paris. She smoked gracefully; the movements displayed her hand and the long, bare, beautiful arm. The shoulder rounded as she raised the

cigarette to her lips; even shoulder-straps would have marred that display. But while he admired, with a sudden movement she cast the cigarette into the fireplace: some one was at the front door.

It was Ellis. "Oh, it's only you, Stephen," she said, when his short form appeared in the doorway. "I needn't have spoiled my smoke, after all."

"You needn't have stopped anything for me," said Ellis, and added: "Just dropped in to inquire for the Judge."

Jim perceived, from Mrs. Harmon's laughter, that this was a byword with her intimates; he offered her the box of cigarettes, and when she chose one, struck a match.

"No, no!" she cried, "your cigarette."

She took it from him, her fingers brushing his; she lighted her own and then offered his again. But when he was about to take it: "No, your mouth!" she ordered, and obediently he opened his mouth to receive it. Then she began to laugh at him, richly and infectiously, so that he laughed with her, but did not miss the spectacle she presented. Standing with her back against the center table, she leaned with her hands upon it; her shoulders became more attractive than ever, and between them rose the swelling throat. He laughed with delight, and letting his eye wander over those charms, he missed the glances, amused and defiant, which passed between Mrs. Harmon and Ellis.

"So you're up to this, Lydia?" he seemed to inquire, but she to respond: "Do not you interfere, sir!"

There is no analysing those processes by which we find our affinities, no theory of chance which will satisfactorily account for the meetings of like states of mind. But here were Jim, once peevish, and Mrs. Harmon, once bored, quite satisfied at last in each

other's company, and before long making this so evident that Ellis perceived that he had interrupted. They left him out; Jim spoke to him from time to time, or Mrs. Harmon turned on him that same warning glance. But if they chose to act so, Ellis did not care; in fact, an idea came to him, and he smiled as he watched Jim, like an astronomical body, moving along the line of least resistance.

For Ellis had just parted from Colonel Blanchard, who had called on him. Ellis had received the Colonel in the one room of his mansion which revealed daily occupancy, which no housekeeper might invade with duster or broom. From among many papers in many cases, Ellis drew Blanchard's promissory note, and silently laid it before him.

"You come to redeem this?" he asked. "More than prompt, Colonel Blanchard."

The Colonel did not offer to explain with exactness. Like that person in the fairy tale who sought to recover the lost cheeses by rolling others after them, Blanchard had been throwing his dollars into the bottomless pit of the stock-market and expecting them to return many-fold. But he had broken the ice once with Ellis; it was easier now. He had, he said, been—unfortunate. But if Mr. Ellis would only advance a little more, he had not the slightest doubt of repaying in full, and very soon.

Ellis knew the signs of the gambler; absolute certainty of making good his losses, equal vagueness as to sources of supply. He made out another check; the Colonel signed another note. They parted, but now, here at the Harmons', Wayne seemed to recall the Colonel by his shallow, gentlemanly ways.

Months ago Judith had told Ellis that his way lay through the men. There were only three who in any degree, through any feeling, might influence her in his

favour. One was Mather: out of the question. One was the Colonel: he was secure. The third was Wayne, of whom, for her sister's sake, Judith wished to make more of a man. During his stay Ellis was mostly silent, studying this new problem.

CHAPTER XVIII

JUDITH BUYS A TYPEWRITER

As the winter advanced, Judith found herself never free from her struggle, the interest of which grew not only greater, but at times intense. For gossip, as she foresaw, was busy with her name; and though as yet she had not braved her circle in the endeavour to bring Ellis in, her friends took occasion to disapprove of her acquaintance with him. The disapproval being conveyed to her in a dozen ways, Judith was frequently in a blaze of anger at people's officiousness, or as often contemptuous of their curiosity. Since interference was always enough to make her obstinate, her friends had no other effect on her than to make her welcome Ellis more kindly than ever.

An unforeseen factor in her troubles was the state of public affairs. Judith read the papers diligently; she perceived a general increase of opposition to Ellis. This did not disturb her, since your true student is aware that the public is as often wrong as right. And at first she took no interest in the search for a leader which was conducted by that usually impotent party, the Reformers. These gentlemen had so often, in Judith's hearing, been gently ridiculed as milk-and-water politicians, that even amusement ceased within her as she read anew of their efforts. Any campaign which they should conduct would be the usual formal and ineffectual protest against "practical politics"; their candidate would be, as always, an obscure person with no claim on

public regard. Judith's interest woke very suddenly when it was whispered that the reform candidate was to be George Mather.

Now she should see Mather and Ellis directly measured, and could know the strength of each. And yet all this was still far away, while another matter was of nearer interest: the rumour of a street-railway strike. Wages had been lowered and the men were discontented; so also were the patrons of the road. The efficiency of the service had greatly fallen off, and the reform newspaper boldly dated the change at Mather's loss of the presidency, charging Ellis with the desire to make money at the public's expense. Judith sniffed at an accusation which she believed would refute itself; she wondered that men should still trust in campaign calumnies. One statement alone caused her serious thought, namely the claim, soberly made, that in managing the details of a great enterprise rather than attending to its finance Ellis was beyond his depth. But at the call to the public to insist upon proper treatment as well as to avert the calamity of a great strike Judith smiled to herself. The public never interested itself in anything; and besides, this was none of the public's business.

Yet, though Judith was right in thinking that the management of the street-railway company concerned the stockholders alone, and though her estimate of the general harmlessness of the reform party was quite correct, her interest in Mather was renewed. Judith was always very well aware of her states of mind, and had noted by this time that whenever her interest in Ellis's brilliancy relaxed, she was certain to find Mather doggedly adding to his own achievements. And she granted it to be much in his favour that though he lacked the fascinating abilities of his keener rival, he had a

formidable solidity. The very fact that his name was used in connection with the reform nomination, gave that nomination seriousness.

Still, the caucus was months ahead, and it was hard to believe that Ellis, who had never yet failed, could botch the management of the street-railway. Men should be easier to manage than securities. And though she received Mather kindly whenever he came, it was impossible not to feel more interest in the man who came oftener, stayed longer, and spoke most of himself. Mather had spoken of himself but once; he did not seek, as Ellis did, to be alone with her, and no longer showed the repressed eagerness of a suitor. He was easy, deliberate, never preoccupied, and took no pains whatever to forward himself with her.

On that evening when Beth had dragged unwilling Jim into the front parlour, to her consequent unhappiness, Mather showed no impatience at the interruption; he even rose again gladly when, Jim having gone, poor Beth came creeping back again.

"George," said Beth timidly, "Jim was a little—rude, just now."

"No, no," he answered heartily. "Don't think of it, Beth."

"If you will bear with him," she pursued, "I think he will come to see how much he owes you."

"Of course he will," he agreed. "Not that I'm anxious for any acknowledgment. I understand he's lonely, Beth."

"He is," she stated eagerly. "He misses——" She blushed, and added hurriedly, "And much of what he says is just manner."

"Don't you suppose I know him?" he asked. "Now don't worry, Beth. Just keep him to his work, and he'll come out all right."

He took her hand; she looked up shyly. "Do you think me foolish, George?"

"Fond used to mean foolish," he answered. "We'll call you fond. Jim must succeed with you to back him!" And he kissed her hand.

"Thank you," said Beth, doubtless referring to the encouragement. "Thank you so much, George! Good-night."

"Poor little thing!" said Mather, as he seated himself after she had gone. "She's not happy, Judith."

"It's Jim," she answered.

"Have you any influence over him?" he asked. "If you have, make him work."

"I noticed," she remarked, "that you did not tell Beth that she has no cause for worry. Is he not satisfactory?"

"It may be inexperience," he answered, "it may be just Jim; I haven't decided yet. The work isn't hard, for the foreman looks after everything mechanical, yet our product is much less than it should be. All I need to do is to go and sit in the Chebasset office for an hour, without opening the door into the mill, and if the men know I'm there we turn out six hundred pounds more that day."

The statement was not surprising, as Judith compared Jim with the man before her. "You think he will not suit."

"I don't say that yet," he replied. "But it's very unpleasant, doing business with your friends."

Again she sat watching him as he stared into the fire, but not with the emotion of that former time, for the state of mind which Beth had aroused was passing. She thought of Mather, with unimpassioned interest, as a fine type of man; but it was undeniable that, emotion being absent, Ellis took an increasingly greater

share of her thoughts, and stirred her imagination more. The world was growing larger before her, not the world of society but of the *World's Work*, the *Harper's Weekly*, almost of the *Scientific American*, those magazines which express the spirit of modern enterprise and hardheadedness, and from which she drew her current information. One of them had recently published Ellis's portrait; Judith glanced from Mather to the table whereon the magazine was at this moment lying, and compared the two men as, but a few moments before, she had contrasted Jim and Mather. Now it was Mather who stood at the little end of the sign of inequality; Ellis was the giant and Mather the mere man. Rumour set them against each other, but though Judith had heard the whisper, "Mather is back," she had also seen the smiles as people added: "Now what will he do?"

"Yes," said Mather, rousing; "between us we can help Jim along." Then he rose, and though it was early, said good-night. He left her wondering at his method of cheerful entrance and speedy exit, his manner of being at home in her presence. But after more thinking, she laid this to the fact that he had nothing on his mind.

Yet he was conscious of a future which beckoned him, and of ambitions, not of his own creating, which stood ready for him to assume. He knew that it was said that Mather had returned, knew that the idle were smiling, the serious were watching to see what he would do. Not only Pease, Fenno, Watson, Branderson, those four powers, held an expectant attitude toward him, but the reform politicians did the same. He knew the public feeling toward abuses might easily be roused, vexed and alarmed as people were with the street railroad. A determined man, in whom the city had confidence, could easily draw many votes to himself.

But "wait," he said to himself, "it's not yet time." He had been approached only by Pease, who inquired: "Have you any street-railway stock?" but when Mather replied he had, Pease merely begged him not to sell, and said no more. Yet there had been that in Pease's manner which meant much.

Mather and Judith were far apart in these days; he sighed as he thought of the distance between them, and turned more willingly to the distractions which politics and business offered. He would have been glad to have his opportunities closer at hand, that he might throw himself into the work. Judith, on the other hand, shrank when first her future came suddenly near.

Her father came home late one afternoon; going to greet him, she had found him in the library, unwrapping a parcel. The Colonel, obeying his impulse toward extravagance, had picked up down town a—wait till she saw it!

"It's very much tied up," said Judith.

"It's rather a valuable thing," answered her father, struggling with the string. "If only I had it out here, I'd cut this twine."

"Is it a pair of scissors?" she asked. "Slip the string over the end, sir."

The Colonel displayed it at last, a Japanese dagger. Its hilt and sheath were massive ivory, yellow with age, carved deeply with grotesques of men in combat. A grinning mask formed the pommel, a writhing dragon the guard; the warriors were grappling, hand to hand. The Colonel offered the knife to Judith. "Look at it," he said with pride.

Something made Judith draw back. "I—it's been used."

The Colonel was irritated. "Upon my word, Judith,

I should think you were Beth. Of course it's been used; you can see that on the blade. Look!"

He drew it from the sheath. The blade was of the usual stout Japanese model, with a quick edge which much whetting had made very fine. An injury had marred the symmetry of the weapon: it was evident that an eighth of an inch had been broken from the point, which, ground again as sharp as ever, had lost in beauty but gained in suggestiveness. The Colonel touched the point.

"On armour or on bone, do you suppose?" he asked.

Judith had recovered herself. "You're rather grewsome, sir."

"Hang it," he complained, sheathing the knife again. "I thought you'd like it. But Jim will, anyway." He laid the knife on the table.

"You're not going to keep it there?" she asked.

"Indeed I am," he answered. "Don't look at it if you don't want to." He started to go, then paused.

"Judith, I have asked Mr. Ellis to dinner."

She was surprised by the statement, so suddenly made and of such deep meaning. All she could do was to repeat his words. "You have asked Mr. Ellis to dinner?"

"Gad!" exclaimed the poor Colonel. "Is anything wrong with you this afternoon? You are hard to please."

"Oh, if you asked him to please me——" she was beginning.

"Well," he explained, "what else could I do when he more than half suggested it? I couldn't be rude to him. I—he—we are pretty good friends."

But he only puzzled her the more. "You are pretty good friends?" asked Judith, again repeating his words.

This conduct on her part made the Colonel spring to

the door, where for an instant he stood and beat his temples. "A woman's a devil!" he exclaimed after that interval, and stamped upstairs.

When a man's behaviour takes this turn, or his philosophy leads him to this conclusion, it is safe for the woman to assume that he has something on his conscience. Judith stood startled.

On what terms was Ellis with her father that he could force an invitation to dinner? And his object?

She watched Ellis during that first meal at her table. Judith had never before seen him in evening dress, nor as yet considered him so personally. His manners were good, his behaviour quiet; no one could have said that he was not a fair representation of a gentleman. That he was more he did not claim.

"This is the first time," he said, as he went in with her to the dining-room, "that I have dined in these togs in any house besides my own, public dinners excepted, of course. It feels stranger than I expected."

"Why should it feel strange?" she asked.

"Because I was not born or bred to it, I suppose."

"Certainly," she remarked, "you show nothing of what you feel."

"When I was a boy," he answered, "when I lost by being too eager on my first trade, I learned never again to show what I felt—unless it's my purpose to. To be quiet and steady, looking and not speaking—you can't imagine what that has done for me."

This frankness of his, which she felt was vouchsafed to her alone, was one secret of his success with Judith. She was interested to hear him acknowledge himself a learner; she sympathised with his effort to make himself fit to sit at any table; and she was impressed by his study of manners as earlier he had studied men and markets. She recognised the full power of his determination and

his self-control. But also she felt that unmistakably she knew his object. And her father, in manner almost deferential to Ellis, consciously or not was his ally.

Ellis made no approach to the subject which was most on his mind, though through the evening he sat alone with her in the parlour. He spoke, as he always did, of his affairs. Moreover, he went away early. But Judith, when he had gone, gazed at the door which had closed behind him. He was aiming at her! All that determination, all that formidable self-control, were trained upon one object: herself. Then she must look forward, and decide.

Did she wish to marry Ellis? She found no reply as she tried to read herself; instead, her mind was confused by a lesser question: why should her father be so friendly to him?

It would not be fair to Judith to say that she enjoyed the sensation created by her intimacy with Ellis; nevertheless she found piquancy in the little thrills of horror which she caused in her circle. For she knew herself to be honestly interested by Ellis's Napoleonic force, and could retaliate upon her clique by amusement at its littleness. She looked at Ellis with clear eyes, perceiving little flaws which his great powers could condone. Yet at the same time she understood her friends' sincerity in their reprobation of him, and forgave them because they knew no better.

She was perfectly aware that her father had no greater caliber than that general to his class; without the slightest filial disrespect, she knew that the Colonel was not capable of her interest in Ellis as a type and as a force. She would not have resented opposition from her father half so much as she had been puzzled at his acquiescence in Ellis's visits; nor would she have been surprised by a sudden paternal outburst so much as by to-night's

encouragement. And understanding him so well, she began to suspect that his motives were different from her own, were lower, and that his interest might be personal. Such a suspicion of her father was quite enough to make her suspect herself.

Three impulses rose within her, and battled together. The first was the old ambition, drawing her to Ellis; the second was refinement, thrusting her away from him. The third was maidenhood, which in Beth was modest but in Judith militant, impelling her to the decision to marry nobody at all. And just now this was strongest.

Nevertheless, Judith recognised the need of a weapon or at least a shield against the assaults which were bound to come. She was not so sure of herself that she dared depend on her own powers alone. Therefore she needed a barrier behind which to retire at need, and she saw but one. Friends could not shield her: she had too few; and pride stood between herself and Mather. Her father would evidently be no protection. Even with Beth her understanding was too slight to be put to use. Employment alone would help her, and of all employments only one attracted her. Yet for that she could be preparing herself.

With bent head she went into the sitting-room where were her father and Beth; they put down their books as she entered, and from the table the Colonel took up the Japanese knife.

"Beth doesn't like this much more than you do," he said.

"It's sinister," explained Beth. "All it's beauty conceals a threat; it's only purpose is to bring death."

"In the past, in the past!" protested her father. "It's only an ornament now."

"Perfectly horrid!" This from Beth, but Judith said: "It must have cost a good deal."

"Oh, well——" the Colonel responded, waving away the subject.

"Father," said Judith abruptly, "I want a hundred dollars."

"A hundred dollars!" he cried. "Where is a hundred dollars to come from in a jiffy?"

"Beth and I dislike the knife so," she suggested. "You might get the dealer to take it back."

Experienced women know how unwilling men are to return boughten articles. "I didn't get it on trial, like a wash-wringer," retorted the Colonel. "What do you want your hundred dollars for?"

"A typewriter."

"A typewriter!" he exclaimed, and Beth echoed the word.

Judith made no explanation. "Why, that's quite out of the usual line of expenditure," objected the Colonel. "It's an extravagance."

"A Japanese dagger might be called an extravagance," Judith returned.

"Then," answered her father, "so might those furs you bought the other day. I told you your old set was good enough."

"If I return the furs," she asked, "will you return the dagger?"

"No, by Jove!" he cried. "It's for me to decide what I will do with my own. I'm the provider."

"And you provide very well," she returned sweetly.

He looked at her with suspicion which sprang from remembrance of his methods as provider, but since she seemed to have no hidden meaning he returned to his reading. Judith, still sweetly, bade them good-night.

But the next day she started from the house dressed in all the glory of her latest possessions. "Judith,"

asked Beth, "you aren't going to wear those furs in the morning?"

"Say good-by to them," answered her sister.

"Judith!" gasped Beth. But Judith only smiled serenely and left the house. By the assurance in bargaining which always carries its point, and which is distinctly feminine, she got for her furs exactly what she gave for them. That afternoon a typewriter was delivered at the house.

It was Mather who had helped her to buy it, Mather who, happening into the store while she was there, had told her that the increase of his business was forcing him to employ more stenographers. So he, even by the most material of standards, was coming on. In order to forget him, she was forced to think of Ellis, and to repeat such aphorisms as *Anyone can be a Gentleman, It takes Genius to be a Man*. But after she had thought of Ellis for a little while, again came the revulsion.

Judith, when in her chamber she first removed the cover of her typewriter, stood for a long while gazing at its black enamel and its nicked keys. The machine became a symbol, a warning of fate, and though in the coming days she practised its use almost eagerly, the typewriter never lost its significance. It was but a feeble defense against the victor of the two rivals.

Victor? The word was bitter. It came always with the force of a blow, staggering her amazonian spirit: must she yield in the end? Bitter, indeed, that while she rebelled against her womanhood she was forced to recognise and dread it. Temporise or struggle as she might, she felt that there lay before her an inevitable choice.

CHAPTER XIX

"PUT MONEY IN THY PURSE"

WHILE Judith Blanchard, as if defying fate, held her head higher than before, there grew on one of our characters, namely Jim Wayne, the habit of looking at the ground. Jim was one of those who, having a weak little conscience, cannot be wicked with an air.

And yet Mrs. Harmon, if she saw any change in him, thought it was for the better. Into her eyes, at least, he looked freely; his glance was more ardent, and only when she spoke of Beth did he glower and look away. In their conversations, therefore, Beth was no longer mentioned. Nor did he ever speak to Beth of his intimacy with Mrs. Harmon.

Thus Beth was surprised one day when, meeting Mrs. Wayne, the elder lady asked: "Wasn't it pleasant to see Jim last night?"

"Jim?" asked Beth. "Was he in town?"

"He came to the house for just one minute. I supposed he was hurrying to see you. Ah, Beth, we mothers!" And Mrs. Wayne sighed.

"But he didn't come to see me," said Beth. "It must have been business that brought him. I'll ask George."

Mather said he had seen Jim, but only by accident, when, returning from the theater, Wayne had passed him, apparently hurrying for the late train.

"In town all the evening and didn't come to see me?"

thought Beth. The idea troubled her so much that Mather perceived it.

Yet no outsider understood the situation quite so clearly as Ellis, who had been before Jim at the Harmons' that evening, and left soon after he came. "I'm going to the Blanchards'," he said. "Shall I tell them to expect you, Mr. Wayne?"

Jim was so unskilled in finesse that he said he was going to take the early train. Ellis smiled.

"You shan't tease him!" declared Mrs. Harmon, putting her hand on Jim's sleeve. At which childishness the smile on Ellis's face became broad, and he went away. Returning after a couple of hours, he was in time to see Jim leave the house hastily, on his way to the station. A woman's silhouette showed on the glass of the vestibule door, and Ellis tried a trick. He ran quickly up the steps and knocked on the door. It was opened immediately.

"Back again?" asked Mrs. Harmon eagerly. "Oh, it's only you, Stephen!"

"Only me," and he turned to go, but she seized him.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded, and then not waiting for an answer asked: "You didn't tell the Blanchards he was here?"

"Not I," he replied. "Lydia, why do you hold me so?"

"Why did you startle me so?" she retorted. "But go along with you!" So he went, having by his manoeuver found out enough.

It was not wholly interest in his house, therefore, which took Ellis to Chebasset before many days. He went to the office of the mill, and as he stood before the chimney and looked up at it he mused that, metaphorically speaking, it would not take much prying at its foundations to make it fall: Wayne was a weak prop

to such a structure. He opened the office door. Jim, from bending over Miss Jenks as she sat at her desk, rose up and stared at him. And the little pale stenographer grew pink.

"People usually knock," Jim was beginning. "—Oh, Mr. Ellis!"

"Down for the afternoon," said Ellis. "I hate to lunch alone at this hotel. Won't you come with me?"

"Why, I——" hesitated Jim.

"Going up on the hill afterward to see my house," added Ellis. "I won't keep you long."

"You're very good," decided Jim. "Yes, I'll come."

"Of course it's wretched stuff they give us here," remarked Ellis when they were seated at the hotel. "Will you take water, or risk the wine?"

"The wine's not so bad," said Jim. He was pleased at his invitation, but even deference to one so rich could not subdue his pride in special knowledge. "I don't know how it happens, but they have some very decent Medoc."

"Then we'll try it," and Ellis ordered a bottle. He began to feel sure of his estimate of a young man who took wine when alone in the country. Bad blood will show; Ellis recalled his experience with Jim's father.

For although the promoter had once met Mather's father and come off second-best, with the elder Wayne he had been easily master. Ellis had bought up most of Wayne's outstanding notes by the time alcohol removed from society one who so well adorned it; the sale of the house had been merely a return of I. O. U.'s. In just the same way Ellis was providing against Blanchard's collapse, and now was watching Jim as the wine worked on him.

"A hole, a hole!" cried Jim, and the wave of his third glass included all Chebasset. "If it weren't

for a little girl, Mr. Ellis——!" Jim gulped down more wine, and Ellis ordered a second bottle.

"That little girl," he asked, "whom I saw at the office?"

"She?" cried Jim loftily. "All very well to have fun with in this place, but a fellow of my standing looks forward to something better than that. Don't pretend ignorance, Mr. Ellis. You're learning what's worth having, even if you didn't know it when first you came to Stirling."

"I know very little about women," returned Ellis steadily.

"Gad," cried Jim, "you've chosen pretty well, then."

"At least," was the reply, and Ellis sighed as if regretfully, "I can't keep three going at once."

Jim laughed. "You don't regret it, I know well enough. You've got too many other things to think of. I have to do it, to make life interesting."

Such a cub as this, it was plain, deserved no mercy. "You won't succeed in one quarter, at least," Ellis answered.

"Where, then?" demanded Jim.

Ellis took his first sip of wine. "At a certain lady's where we have met."

Jim resorted to pantomime. He reached for the bottle and filled his glass; this he held up to the light, and squinted through it; then with deliberation he drank off the wine, and reached for the fresh bottle. After filling, he looked at Ellis. All this he did with an air of very, very evident amusement, and at the end he chuckled.

"For the reason," continued Ellis, quite unmoved, "that you haven't the cash." He took his second sip, but Jim laughed outright.

Then the youth became grave. "Money," he said emphatically, "is all very well in its place. But though you've made your way by it, sir, you overestimate it. Why, that Mrs. Harmon would take——" Suddenly Jim grew red in the face. "You insult her, sir!"

"Good," remarked Ellis, very coldly. "The waiter is out of the room; recollect yourself when he returns. Recollect also that Mrs. Harmon is a very old friend of mine."

"But," stammered Jim, somewhat abashed, "when you say that she would sell herself——"

"You were drinking before you came here," said Ellis, "or you wouldn't take such ideas so easily." He removed the bottle from Jim's elbow, then, as if on second thought, he put it back again. "This is a lonely place, Mr. Wayne; I don't wonder that you take a cock-tail occasionally in the morning. But just remember that it may prevent you from seeing a man's meaning."

"I thought——" began Jim, but Ellis cut him short.

"I know; but never mind. I meant, my dear man, a libel on the sex, perhaps, but not on the individual. They're fond of finery, that's all. And you haven't the money to give it." He looked at Jim with a smile.

"You can't give it to her!" cried Jim. But the exclamation was almost a question.

"To some women you can't—perhaps. But I've never met the kind. And do you suppose the Judge knows what comes into the house?"

"Gad!" murmured Jim.

"A weakness of the sex," resumed Ellis. "Just remember that. Women are softer than we; we've got to humour them. There's no harm in it; a pearl pin now and then—something good, oh, you need something pretty good, or nothing at all."

"Then I'll go on the nothing-at-all system," said Jim with gloom.

"Rot!" answered Ellis. "Do you save so carefully?"

"Save!" exclaimed Jim. "Do you suppose I can save?"

"I forgot," and Ellis spoke apologetically. "Of course, with your salary. But there'll be a good time some day, Mr. Wayne."

"When I'm old," grumbled Jim.

"Gad!" cried Ellis, "with your ability and your youth, I'd be some thousands richer every year!"

"I know," answered the lamb, trying to look as wolfish as he should. "But a fellow can do nothing nowadays without capital."

"But you have something?"

"Some few thousands," replied Jim with deep scorn of fate. "And in my mother's name."

"Your mother is conservative?" asked Ellis.

"Scared," answered Jim.

"And all you learned on the market," said Ellis with sympathy, "going here to waste! Too bad! Get some one to back you."

Jim looked at him sidewise. "Will you do it?"

But Ellis smiled. "Why should I? No; stand on your own feet. Get your mother's power of attorney, and surprise her some day by doubling her income. But as for that, doesn't money pass through your hands down here every week?"

"Passes through quickly," answered Wayne. "Comes down Saturday morning, and I pay the men at noon."

"Pay every week?" Ellis inquired. "Every fortnight is what I believe in. But of course—and yet three days, with clever placing, would be enough to make you double that money. Three weeks, and you could—do anything!"

“By Jove!” cried Jim, starting.

“I’ll be off,” said Ellis, pushing back his chair. “This lunch was better than I expected. “We must meet here again, some day.”

“Good!” answered Jim. He finished his last glass, but as he rose he was as steady as if he carried nothing. “For all that,” muttered Ellis to himself, “your brain is softer than half an hour ago.” They separated at the door of the hotel, and went their respective ways.

When Ellis, after inspecting his house, stood on the terrace and looked down upon Chebasset, he still had Jim on his mind. Would the ideas work? Did he still taste that wine in his mouth, or his own words? Small! and Ellis spat. Small, but well done, as the event was to prove. And yet Ellis had neither heard nor read of Mephisto and the student, of Iago and Roderigo.

CHAPTER XX

THE POWER OF SUGGESTION

It is wearing when one's wishes travel faster than events, and have to wait for time to catch up. Mrs. Harmon felt it so. "The days go too slow," she declared to Ellis, a week after his visit to Chebasset.

"Not at all," he answered. "I think they go about right."

"You're like a cat," she said impatiently. "I watched one hunting a bird once, and it took forever to make its spring."

"But it caught the bird. Then wasn't the time well spent, Lydia?"

"I'm not so cold-blooded," she replied. "I can't be deliberate. I must have something going on."

"Therefore you listen for the door-bell," remarked he. "Lydia, he can't come up to-night."

"Stephen!" she cried as if indignantly—yet she began to smile.

"Mather keeps fair track of him," said Ellis.

"I hate Mr. Mather!" declared the lady with energy.

"What's the use?" inquired the gentleman calmly.

"Upon my word, Stephen," exclaimed Mrs. Harmon, "if any one in this town ought to hate him, it's you. He's the one man who stands between you and—and everything you want."

Ellis smiled. "People say so?"

"It's true!" she insisted. "What are your friends in politics most afraid of? That he will go in against

them! Who can make the best stand against your mayor? Mather, of course! With him as mayor—what then, Stephen?"

"All talk," he answered, still smiling.

"Very well," she retorted. "But if ever it comes to Mather at city hall, Doddridge as district attorney, and my husband on the bench, some people will leave town hurriedly."

"You mean me?" he asked indifferently.

"Of course not," she answered. "But don't laugh, Stephen; there's really something in all this. And in other matters, too. The Judge has sold his street-railroad stock."

Ellis roused at once. "He has? To whom?"

"Mr. Pease."

"Well," and the promoter relaxed again. "I am glad that the Judge is out of it, even if Pease is deeper in."

"Abiel kept back five shares," said the Judge's worthy wife, "and when next it comes to a stockholders' meeting, he'll be there. I can't do anything with him; you know that well enough. All I can do is to tell you what he tells me. Stephen," and her voice became persuasive, "why not take notice of complaints?"

"You mean transfers?" he inquired.

"Yes, and better service: more cars at the rush hours, and more attention to the suburbs."

"Higher wages to the men, too, I suppose?" he asked.

"You don't want a strike?" she cried.

"Now stop worrying!" he commanded. "You hear the Judge at the breakfast table, and never see my side. Who does he say are against me—Pease, Fenno, Branderson—all their kind?"

She nodded. "Yes, every one of them."

"Well," he said, "if I have a majority of stock—either

mine or belonging to men who belong to me—all the rich swells in the State can't touch me. Lydia, Mather made this street railroad for me; he didn't know he was doing it, but he did it, and when I wanted it I took it. It's the best thing I've struck yet, and I'm not going to let it go. Nor the profits, either. Transfers and extra cars? I tell you the public's got to ride, and ride in what I allow 'em."

"Very well," she replied. "You usually know what you're about. But the papers——"

"Rot, rot, rot!" he interrupted. "You hear so much of this Mather talk that you believe it. Do you read the *Newsman*?"

"Abiel won't have it in the house."

"Buy a copy once in a while, when you feel blue. You'll see that Mather's a man of straw."

"Does Judith Blanchard think him so?"

He turned upon her. "Doesn't she?"

"I don't know what she thinks," she confessed.

"Then," he advised, softening his frown, "wait and watch. I tell you it's going all right."

She wondered that he felt so sure, but she subsided; then other thoughts came into her mind. "Stephen," she asked, "are you doing much now—on the market, I mean?"

"Always doing a lot," he replied.

"What's safest and surest?"

"Government bonds," he answered with a smile.

"No, no," she said. "I mean surest to go up and do something quickly."

"Lydia," he responded, "if young Wayne wants to know anything from me, let him ask me himself."

"Oh!" she cried, pouting, "how quick you are! Well, I did ask for Jim." There was just a little hesitation as she spoke the name. "But he gets so little

chance to see you. Come, tell me something; give me a tip, there's a good fellow."

"I calculated once," he replied, "that if I told every one who asked, there would be just twice my capital in the market, after the things I want. No, Lydia, let every man stand on his own feet; I do my hunting alone."

"Stephen!" she coaxed. "Stephen! Oh, you obstinate thing! At least tell me what you're buying."

"If you want to help young Wayne, don't ask that. I look long ways ahead; sometimes I buy to hold, but he can't. I'm not afraid of a drop; he is. Let him work out his get-rich-quick scheme by himself, and he'll be better off than if I helped him."

"At least tell me what you think of Poulton?" But he was obdurate. "Stephen, I'll never ask you a favour again!"

"With that pin at your throat you don't need to," he replied. "Lydia, I never gave you that."

"I have a husband," and she affected indignation. "How can you insinuate—oh, Stephen, you see too much. Well, what do you think of it?"

"I think," he responded with deliberation, "that I've not seen Miss Beth Blanchard wearing any new jewelry lately. Aren't you unkind?"

"No!" she pouted again. "I am his mother confessor." Which appeared so humorous to them both that they laughed; and then, feeling that they had been skating on rather thin ice, they left the subject. Only—Mrs. Harmon wished she knew why Ellis was so sure of Judith.

Had she seen what Mather saw she might have guessed what Mather guessed. Ellis lunching with the Colonel down town, at an out-of-the-way place, to be sure, but lunching with him openly—that meant a good deal.

It was a French restaurant to which Mather went at times for the sake of its specialties, but when from the door, one day, he saw the Colonel and Ellis at one of the tables, he went away again; yet had been seen.

"He saw us," said Ellis. "And if he saw us, others will. What was the use of insisting on such a meeting-place, Colonel?"

The Colonel was annoyed, confoundedly so.

"All very well," returned Ellis. "But our business is not secret, any more than the transactions which go on in the open street. Come, Colonel Blanchard, don't you think it's time for a different line of procedure?"

The Colonel apprehensively asked his meaning.

"I'll tell you," answered Ellis. "Don't think me rude, sir, if I speak freely. All I've been thinking is that if I'm a business acquaintance merely, keep me as such. But if I'm a little more, if I'm to come to your house and your table, let us meet a little more openly—at the Exchange Club, let us say. And if I dine at your house again, let's have," the Colonel's head was bowed, and Ellis therefore spoke boldly, "other people there."

The Colonel marked with his knife upon the cloth. Three times five thousand, without security, meant that Ellis had passed beyond the stage of business acquaintanceship. Well, never mind; Judith encouraged the man, so where was the harm? The whole thing was the most natural in the world.

"Why, Mr. Ellis," he said, looking up, "I like this little place to eat in; it reminds me of Paris, you know. I hadn't thought we would seem to be dodging people." ("Lies better than Wayne," thought Ellis.) "The Exchange Club, of course, if you wish it; it's more convenient, anyway."

But Ellis's reminder, before they parted, the Colonel

took hard. "And perhaps we can have a little dinner-party soon, Colonel?"

"Yes," answered the Colonel. "Yes, yes." He was as near snappish as he dared to be, vindicating his military character. Only the recollection of his daughter's wishes kept him from being rude, downright rude. Thus the Colonel to himself, as he went homeward alone. Yet, instead of informing Judith that she was privileged to give a dinner-party, he was much too absorbed to vouchsafe her any account of where he had been. "Don't bother me," was his gentle reply when she asked if he had seen any one down town.

"Father!" cried Judith, really hurt.

"But I heard this," said her father, stopping at the door of his study, and giving his piece of news with an unction for which only the passions of the natural man can account. "They say a street-railway strike is coming surely, unless Mr. Ellis gives in."

Judith stood with her hands behind her back, regarding her parent cheerfully. "Oh, well!" she said lightly.

"You don't believe it?" demanded the Colonel.

"Strikes never come as often as they are threatened," she replied.

"But this time the stockholders may have something to say."

"They need more votes for that," she answered.

The Colonel looked her over. "Ellis has been telling her what to think," he concluded. For a moment he entertained the impulse to propose the dinner-party, but Ellis's virtual ordering of him rankled. He went into his study.

Mather, on his part, took his lunch at another restaurant and then went down to Chebasset. He felt somewhat depressed; life was not pleasant, not with the

sight of Ellis and the Colonel before his mental vision, nor with the task he had to do. For the returns from the mill were entirely inadequate, and Jim must be spoken to. Lecturing a sulky boy promised to be unpleasant; besides, Jim would report it to Beth. Mather would have given a good deal to put the matter off, if only for a day.

But Jim was not at the mill. "He has gone to Stirling, Miss Jenks?"

"Yes, sir, to the city. He had a telephone message from——" Miss Jenks hesitated and stammered.

"Miss Blanchard? Oh, of course." And Mather, amused at the modesty of the little stenographer, sat down at Jim's desk, which had once been his own. "The daily reports, if you please, Miss Jenks." While she went for them, he stared idly at the decorations by whose means Jim had sought to domesticate himself at the mill: dance cards, an invitation, and photographs of Beth, Jim's mother, and Mrs. Harmon. Mather frowned at the presence of the last, in such company.

Armed with the daily reports, Mather went into the mill, and certain of the men, at certain of the machines, heard words which were far from pleasing. The words were not many, and were delivered quietly, but backed by telling figures from the returns they were unanswerable. It was a slight relief that so many men were visited in Mather's round, for company made the misery a bit lighter, but the foreman trembled for his turn. He took it in the office, alone with Mather and Miss Jenks. That during the summer and fall so many pounds daily had been turned out, and in the winter so many less, was laid before him. The foreman could suggest only one excuse.

"Mr. Wayne, sir. The men—some of them don't like him, and some laugh at him."

"You attend to your men, Waller, and Mr. Wayne and I will do our part. Understand, I put the mill in your hands now; Mr. Wayne will attend strictly to the office. If you bring the men up to the old mark, ten dollars more for you in the month. If you don't——" And the manager waved his hand. Waller, between fear and hope, withdrew to the safe side of the door, and mopped his brow.

Mather also wiped his forehead; he was glad, after all, that Jim had not been there; he would try running the mill on this system, and Beth for a while, perhaps for good, could be spared unhappiness.

But when, after writing Jim a letter detailing the proposed change, he rose from his chair, he found a workman standing by his side. The man, with some appearance of unhappiness, touched his forelock. "Beg pardon, sir, but the missis is sick."

"Your wife? I'm sorry. I suppose you've come for an advance of money."

"No, sir!" and the man showed pride. "I can get along, Mr. Mather, on my regular pay."

"Then what can I do for you?"

"It's this new regulation, sir—fortnightly pay."

"Fortnightly pay!" echoed Mather.

"Yes, sir. It'll be all right usually, Mr. Mather, and none of the men cares much."

There was a tightness in the manager's brain; he put up his hand and stroked his lip. "Let me see, when did the new system begin?"

"Last week, sir. And as I say, I wouldn't care, sir, but just now it comes so hard that I'm askin'—just as a favour, Mr. Mather—to be paid weekly till the missis is well."

"So!" said Mather, recovering himself.

"I hope it's not too much to ask, sir?"

"No, no," and the manager turned to the safe.

What was he to find—an empty cash drawer? His hand trembled as he swung open the heavy door; he thought of little Beth. If Jim had been so weak, so ungrateful—it was all right! There lay the rolls of bills!

But not the same; the envelopes had been opened, the money mussed and then crammed hastily back into the drawer again. Moreover, these were not the fresh, crisp bills which Pease took pride in sending weekly to the mill. Mather took the whole drawer to the desk and paid the workman. "Make a note, Miss Jenks, that Swinton is to be paid weekly so long as his wife is ill." The man, thankful, departed; but Mather sat over the cash drawer, sorting the money and counting it. There were many bills of the high denominations which never came to the mill, since they would be of little use in paying the men. But it was all there, every cent. What was the meaning of it? And now it was Miss Jenks who stood at Mather's side, waiting to speak. He thrust the money again into the drawer.

"Miss Jenks?" As she did not speak at once he looked at her face, and asked hastily: "Is anything wrong?"

"I've—I've got to leave here, Mr. Mather."

He rose and put the cash drawer in its place; then he went back to her. "This is very astonishing. Why?"

"I must," was all she would say.

"Is it wages? Hours? Are you overworked?" To each question she shook her head. "I consider you very valuable to us. I have thought of asking you to come to the city office."

She looked up at him eagerly. "Oh, let me come!"

"Then there is some friction here?"

She looked down, blushing. "No friction."

"One question only, Miss Jenks. Is it Mr. Wayne?"

She nodded; Mather took his seat. Then she took a step nearer to him, looking to see if he were angry. "Don't be put out with him. He—I—it's nothing, Mr. Mather."

"So I should suppose," he answered grimly.

"Mr. Mather," she said suddenly, "when I worked for you here I got to think of you almost as an older brother. Don't be offended." She made a little gesture of one thin hand. "I have no mother. May I ask you if I am doing right?"

He was touched, and rose again. "Certainly."

"Mr. Wayne," she began again slowly, "has been very—nice to me. I didn't think about it; I got to like it very much. Yesterday he—kissed me. Isn't he engaged to Miss Blanchard, sir?"

"He is."

"I thought so; and yet, Mr. Mather, I couldn't be offended. This afternoon, when he went away, he came to kiss me again, and I couldn't try to stop him. Was it shameful, sir?"

He ground his teeth. "Of him!"

"And he left me this." She opened the hand which she had held tight closed, and showed a jewelled pin.

Mather took it; it was costly, very handsome. "Well, Miss Jenks?"

"I don't think I'm that kind of a girl, sir. And yet I'm frightened at myself—for not being able to resist him, I mean. And so I've got to go, sir." Up to this time she had spoken quietly, with little sign of emotion, but now she clasped her hands together, and tears welled out on her cheeks. "I cannot stay another day!"

He turned away from her, and for a space strode up and down the office, cursing silently. Then he sat and tried to think. Jim, Jim!

"You're not offended, sir?" she asked.

"Offended? You poor little girl, it tears at my heart to see your face and know what you feel. You're doing just right; yes, just right. You shall come to me in the city, to-morrow if you wish. I know an old and homely woman who will be glad of this place."

She shrank at the energy of his sneer. "You won't be angry with him, sir?"

"Not angry?" he cried, astonished. Then he said quietly, "I shall do nothing at once. But there are other considerations as well."

"Others?" she asked fearfully. "He isn't—going wrong, Mr. Mather?"

"What makes you think that?" he demanded.

"Perhaps," she said, "I'd better tell you something, if it will help you help him. There's one man—oh, Mr. Mather, I've been so glad of the way the papers speak of you—if you would only stand for mayor of Stirling, sir! I dislike that Mr. Ellis. And it's he who's been here twice to see Mr. Wayne, and telephoned him this afternoon to come to town."

"Of course you know there's no reason he shouldn't?"

"Only I don't like him, sir. And Mr. Wayne made something of a secret of it, though he's been talking with me quite freely, lately. But I couldn't help knowing, and I hope there's nothing wrong." She took a step toward her desk. "If you've got nothing for me to do, sir, I'll go now. To-morrow at your office, Mr. Mather?"

"To-morrow." He sank so deep in thought that he scarcely heeded her good-bye, and leaving the pin on Jim's desk she slipped out of the office with her hopes, fears, thanks, trembling on her lips but yet unexpressed. She was glad to leave the little office where she had been so frightened of herself. And since Mather had been always kind, she felt sure he would be kind to Wayne.

Kind! Mather's fingers itched for Jim's collar. Perhaps he had intended no harm with the girl, but such things went easily from bad to worse. And what had he been doing with the money? But the only real reason for complaint lay in the new system of fortnightly pay. Mather concluded that he would wait till Saturday; then he would come down, see the men paid, and have it out with Jim.

CHAPTER XXI

ELLIS TAKES HIS LAST STEP BUT ONE

It was midwinter, in the full swing of social events, yet Judith had been withdrawing herself more and more from what was going on. She disliked people's talk; besides, her interest in mere frivolity was growing less, fixing itself with proportionate keenness upon Ellis's affairs.

For Ellis came continually oftener, and at last she had begun to look forward to his visits. More than one of his interests had been growing complicated; he told her of them freely. Most of all, the street-railway matter promised trouble from the threatened strike.

On the evening of Ellis's and the Colonel's third exchange of note and check Ellis came to see Judith; she was very ready for a talk. It pleased and flattered him to see the flash of the eye lighting up her beauty, the eagerness with which she led him to the familiar subject. "Stunning!" he thought to himself. "Is she dressed up so for me?" The handsome gown, the few but valuable jewels—and the face! "Soon!" he said to himself confidently. Meanwhile, step by step!

He had planned the next one carefully, spending on it more thought than on many of his great strokes in politics or business. She was more on his mind than ever, partly because, as a woman, she was a strange problem to him; partly, however, because his interest in her was growing steadily deeper, and to win her was becoming constantly of greater moment. The unnamed

emotion still increasing in him, he explained it by the fact that it was impossible for him to be contented as he once was, in the days when he drove without rest at his politics or business, having nothing to look forward to at the day's end, and with only the dull set of common-minded men as his companions. How far finer was Judith than they! Though he still feared her idealism, it gave him a sense of the worth of beauty and refinement. And that other faculty in her, to appreciate his material achievements, was not only a stimulus which he felt had become indispensable, but was also the susceptibility by which he hoped to win her. Aiming all his powers at that weakness, and looking back on the occasion when the mere sight of Mather was enough to capture Judith's attention from him, Ellis planned so to raise her interest in himself that it would permit of no interruption.

He told her of the threatened strike. The demands of the men were not serious; it would not be a great drain on his pocket to grant the increase in wages. The free transfers would be troublesome; the extra service in rush hours a bother: nevertheless, all this could be undertaken, and would be, if it were not for the principle involved. And in order that he might know how to decide, he needed her help.

"My help!" cried Judith.

"Perhaps," he said, smiling at her interest, "you don't realise that I consult you, Miss Blanchard. But all these things I speak to you about have more or less dependence on the state of public feelings. Do you know that I have come to consider you as a kind of barometer of that?"

"Me?" she cried again, much pleased.

"You read the papers, and digest the news. You see people and talk things over. You're rather above

ordinary business, naturally, and so, looking down on its workings, it seems to me as if you see *into* it. Do you understand? You see clearer than the men themselves who are in the midst of it."

"I never supposed that," she said. "I never dreamed of it!"

"You have a habit of looking forward, too," he went on. "That's what I like, what I need. I get confused myself, sometimes; I can't see the battle for the smoke. My own strategy is often doubtful to me. Then I turn to you."

"You overrate me," she exclaimed.

"Not I," he answered. "You aren't offended if I speak so frankly? For I wouldn't make use of you unless you are quite willing."

"Certainly I am willing to help," she said.

"Thank you," he replied. "Now it's this way, Miss Blanchard. I'm not working only for the present, as I think you know. I'm looking rather farther forward than most people. Besides, I'm mixed up in many matters. Finally I'm rather alone. Politics, the railway, the cotton corporation, half a dozen things I carry almost by myself; I'm the chief, anyway; I haven't even a partner to consult. I have to watch my own lieutenants to see they do things right, good workers as they are. It's brains I need to help me—reliable scouts and clear-headed advisers."

"I can't be an adviser," said Judith, "but I could scout, perhaps. Will you let me?"

"I want you for both," he returned. "You can advise, and you do. I want some scouting just now, and advice after it, by somebody absolutely impartial. Somebody who wouldn't hesitate to set me right if she saw that I was wrong."

"Tell me!" begged Judith.

"I have my preconceived notions," he said. "Let me explain them to you, so that you can understand the line I'm working on. This isn't capital versus labour, Miss Blanchard; it isn't even the corporation against the public—not as I look at it. No, it's the present against the future. I could do the things the public wants; certainly I could. But that's not the point. The question is, do they know what's best for themselves? That's for you and me to decide!"

He had been leaning forward, speaking with emphasis; now as he finished he sat again upright, but the flash of his eye kindled an answering fire in hers. "For you and me!" she repeated.

He leaned forward again, holding her glance with his. "The people," he said, "think they know what they want. But the best of them are very shortsighted, even the educated men. Your friends are beginning to join the cry against me; I won't deny it sounds mighty reasonable: Better hours and pay for the men; better service for the people. Well, do you or I suppose that's all there is in it?"

She drew in her breath; how much more he saw, and knew, than others!

"Let's go back," he said. "I'm in politics, indirectly. I'm blamed for it. Fellows, good fellows I've known for years, are looked down on and called Ellis's men, just because they see things as I do. All very well for men who sit back with white gloves on their hands and say that politics aren't clean. Come now, I'll acknowledge it to you, Miss Blanchard, politics are not clean. I've seen things done that—well, never mind. I believe corruption has been in the world since the first of time; I think it's in a certain grade of human nature. You can't get it out. But there's less of it than is

supposed; and on my word, Miss Blanchard, none of it can be laid to me!"

Again she drew a breath, and still meeting his eye, she nodded her agreement.

"If one of those fellows, in the city government through no act of mine, votes for my measures, shall I pay him not to? There are few enough of them. Well, we understand that, but people might ask me why I'm in politics at all. Miss Blanchard, I point to what I've done. And to what I'm doing! Sometimes it hurts me that people misunderstand me; mostly I laugh. But I want you to know, as I guess you do anyway. I'm building this city for the future."

Again he drew away and made the impressive pause, but in a moment he was once more at the charge. "The water-works affair, look at that! People cry 'Steal! Boodle!' But do they know what I'm doing? Do they know what I'm saving them from? Miss Blanchard, you know, if they don't, that this city is at a turning point in its development. We're just growing from a small city into a big one. Then it's the part of the men with brains to prepare for the change. Look at Boston, look at New York: see how they're struggling with their water problems, their lighting problems, above all with their transportation problems—and why?" He snapped out the question abruptly, then answered it himself. "Because they didn't look forward and prepare! But that's just what I propose to do for Stirling!"

She was quite his own now, listening as if fascinated. Her bright eye was fixed on his, confusing him slightly, yet it gave encouragement. His confidence increased, and after a moment he began again with more energy.

"Look at the water-works—they're vast! I've condemned a whole valley out Grantham way; the reser-

voirs we're making are much too large for the city. But in ten years, what then? Still too large, I'll grant. Yet when Stirling is twice its present size, *then* the reservoir and park system, for I'm combining them, will have been got so cheaply that this city will be richer than any other. Water system installed, lighting problems solved, all land necessary for municipal purposes bought and paid for *now*. The next generation, Miss Blanchard, will have reason to praise us. Isn't that plain? And I mean to do the same with the transportation system."

"Go on!" she begged him as he paused.

"It's somewhat different in this case," he said. "The water-works are being made with public money, the parks also. But the street-railway is a corporation, and although I control it, there are stockholders to consider, and a great big public to keep in good temper while at the same time I am working for the future. There's a problem, Miss Blanchard—to pay dividends, put on extra cars, and raise wages, while I'm buying land for future stations, barns, and terminals, and while I'm even thinking of the construction of a subway."

"A subway!" she cried.

"Yes," he answered, "don't you see the advantage of it?"

"Indeed I do," exclaimed Judith. "Our streets are very crowded now, down town, and the cars make such blocks! But a subway! Wouldn't it be terribly expensive?"

"Looked at in a broad way, no," he answered. "To condemn and take the necessary real estate will cost nothing now to what it will ten years hence. And can you doubt that it will be needed then? Then why not set about it now? Why not ask the public to incommode itself for a while, to gain a permanent benefit?

What they ask is only temporary; if we let things slip along from year to year, patching up and patching on, we'll never be better off. There was a man hired a place; in fifteen years of rent he paid the whole value of it and yet didn't own it. Better to have mortgaged and bought, in the first place. That's what I propose to do here."

"I understand," she said.

"I acknowledge," he went on, "that I appoint myself to do these things. Official, isn't it? And I'm selfish about it. I want to do it my own way, and I want to have the credit of doing it. Oh, it's a job, it's a task!" As if carried away by enthusiasm, he rose and stood before her. "I tell you, Miss Blanchard," he cried, "I am just beginning the hardest fight of my life! But I like work, I enjoy a fight, and with the help of my friends (and you're the chief of them) I shall put it through!"

He took three steps away from her, and she watched him, not feeling her throbbing heart and quickened breath. As he turned again, she asked him how he meant to go about the work.

"By legislative help," he explained, coming back to his seat by her side. "Prepare to hear a good deal against me: that I've bought the common council and own seats in the legislature, for instance. It's long been said that the mayor's my own—for purposes of corruption, of course. Now you can see that my plans are too big for me to carry out by myself, or even for the corporation to do alone. I must have public money to help me. And besides that, more than that, I must be granted the application of a principle which has seldom, almost never, been allowed out of the hands of the legislature or the courts."

"What is that?" she asked.

He answered, "Eminent domain!"

"To be able," she asked in astonishment, "by yourself to condemn and take land?"

"Yes," he answered confidently.

"You will meet very strong opposition."

"I expect it," he replied. "And I shall be justified in asking for the right. I am looking to the result."

She nodded thoughtfully.

"Now, your part in this," he began again, and she looked up quickly, "is to be, if you will let me say it so, my ear. The plan will be proposed soon; I shall know what's said for it, I want to know what's said against it. You can help me gauge the quality of the opposition. Will you do it?"

"Willingly," she answered. "But the strike?"

"Ah," he returned, "I wish I might ask you to help me there also. There are two things which can assure a strike success: one is determination in the men themselves, one is the sympathy of the public. Do you go about enough, do you see people enough—of the middle class, I mean—to be able to form an opinion on these two points?"

"I can do so," she answered.

"Thank you," he said eagerly. "One thing more—your advice! When you have done all this, will you give me your opinion freely?"

"If it is of any worth," she replied, "you will be welcome to it."

The enthusiasm, he feared, had lapsed; he did his best to rouse it. "If you range yourself against me, I shall not be surprised."

"I? Against you!" she cried.

"I appreciate the ties of habit and friendship," he said. "But for them there are many who would be

with me. Conservatism is a strong force, as I know very well."

"Do you think," she inquired, "that I cannot see the wise course when you show it to me so clearly?"

He concealed his gratification by a counter question. "Do you see the struggle which is to come out of this?"

"How much and how long will it be?"

"It may take years," he said. "Political campaigns may turn on it. Next fall's election, the mayoralty, may be determined by what we two, here in this parlour, talk over by ourselves." He saw the flush which overspread her face, the pride which came into her eyes, yet he hesitated before the final stroke.

"Will all that happen?" she asked eagerly.

She opened the way for him. Dropping his eyes, he sat for a moment to collect himself; when he looked up his face was serious. "Miss Blanchard," he said, "there will be from all this certain results, personal to me, which are beginning to show very clearly. Whether your friends are going to make this a demonstration against me, or whether they think they must act, I can't say, but we are going to come to an open rupture." Then he looked at her with a smile which was half amused, half deprecatory. "Do you remember that I once confessed to you my foolish social ambition?"

"It was not foolish!" she objected.

"Perhaps not," he returned, "and yet—perhaps. At any rate, I had the ambition once."

"Do you not now?" she asked.

"If I have," Ellis answered, "I may have to give it up. For if your friends come out against me, and if we fight this to a finish, then it will all amount to this: that I must choose between my career and my—acquaintances."

He was managing her well! He felt an unauthorised

emotion, prompting him to say words akin to those which he had heard Jim say to Beth, but—with such inspiration as Judith's—far more strong and eager. Yet all such feeling he beat down, and though she felt the lack, he was succeeding with her. Coldly as he made his statements and carefully repressed all emotion, he was still able to rouse her enthusiasm.

"Would you hesitate?" she asked with spirit.

"It seems easy to you," he returned steadily, "but consider. It means that I must live a life alone. I have the American spirit, Miss Blanchard, which urges me upward. I have seen what is better than what I have; I am trying for it. Whatever happens, I won't go back. But the door is shut in my face. So I stay alone outside."

"It must not be!" she exclaimed.

"But if it happens so?"

"It is too unjust!" She could say nothing more, but her feelings enlisted her on his side, and she restrained herself with difficulty. Her generosity, her energy, showed so plainly in her glowing features that he asked himself: "Is this the moment?" Then the rings of the portieres rattled.

It was the Colonel, who, having heard the earnest tones, and knowing well how to approach Judith on an unpleasant subject, chose to come now in order to protect himself by the presence of a third person. "Judith," he said, standing before them, beaming benevolently, "I have just had an idea. It was very pleasant when Mr. Ellis dined with us recently. Suppose we ask him again, and have some others here: Mrs. Harmon, say, for a matron, and some of our friends.—With Ellis here," the Colonel thought, "she can't refuse."

But he was surprised at the eagerness with which she accepted the suggestion. Judith began at once to plan

whom she should ask, and astonished the Colonel by the names she mentioned. The Judge, the Fennos, none of the younger people. "A formidable affair," exclaimed he, surprised and puzzled. "Do you think that you care to attempt so much?"

Judith turned to Ellis. "You shall see!" she said.

"You are very kind," he answered.

And now he was all on fire, waiting for the Colonel to go. This girl, so cold to others, so kind to him, was wonderful. With her, what could he not achieve? "Go, go!" he found himself muttering impatiently, as still the Colonel stayed. Why did he not leave them to themselves?

But it was Judith who was keeping her father, for she had seen the shadow of the approaching crisis, and feared it as a woman may who, having once dreamed of love, flinches at a union devoid of passion. Not yet! So she made the Colonel talk. Ellis finally took his leave; certainly much had been gained. Judith accompanied him to the door.

"I shall think over all you have said," she told him. "It is wonderful, what you have planned!"

"And you will help me?" he asked.

"Be sure of that," she replied.

Yes, much had been gained, he told himself as he went away. He had thrilled her, and if he could rouse her so easily—— He struck his hands together. There should be no more delay.

Judith went into the sitting-room, where her father was explaining to Beth the plans for the dinner. Judith felt that she was trembling with the reaction from her previous excitement; as Beth's quiet eyes rested on her it seemed as if her feelings could be read. "Don't you think it will be pleasant, Beth?" asked the Colonel.

"No," answered Beth firmly. "I hope it will not be done."

Leaving her father to expostulate and argue, Judith went up-stairs to her chamber. Beth's disapproval had the effect of a cold sponge pressed upon her temples; she began to control herself. Never had Judith been able to overlook Beth's opinion lightly; she expressed the feeling of the best of their caste. What power had Ellis, Judith asked, that he could so carry her away? She sat down to reason with herself, to measure by line and square the structure reared by his imagination. Then she began to glow again: how wonderful, far-reaching, philanthropic were his plans!

In that mood she went to bed, and had fallen into a doze when she became aware that some one was replenishing the fire. When the bright blaze had lighted up the ceiling, Beth, in her wrapper, came and seated herself at Judith's side.

CHAPTER XXII

HAROUN AL RASCHID

BETH saw that her sister was awake; stooping forward, she kissed her gently. "Don't be put out with me, dear," she said, "for what I'm going to say."

"I will not," answered Judith. The hour, the warm bed, the firelight, made her unusually gentle. "What is it, dear?"

"It is that dinner," answered Beth. "I wish to make sure you understand—what people will think of it, I mean. Excuse me, Judith; I see it more clearly than you can, as a third person, dear."

"Well," Judith asked, "what will people think?"

"Two things," Beth answered. "First, that you are trying to get Mr. Ellis into society."

"I am willing they should think that."

"The second is," went on Beth slowly, "that the dinner, given here at our house, and not at Mrs. Harmon's, as perhaps you could arrange to have it——"

"Not with the Judge's consent," Judith interrupted.

"Or some one else's, then," said Beth. "Given by us, anyway, people would think the dinner would mean——"

"Go on," directed Judith.

"That you and Mr. Ellis are engaged."

There was silence, in which the crackling of the fire, and the darting of the shadows on the ceiling, were painfully noticeable to Judith. It was true! People would think thus.

"Well?" asked Beth at length. Judith made no answer, and Beth, bending down, snuggled her head against her sister's throat. "I hope," she whispered, "that you can manage to give it up." Still Judith made no sign; Beth only made it harder. "Judith, Judith!" Beth urged, gently pressing her with her arms.

"I don't see," said Judith at last, speaking with difficulty, "how I can give up the dinner."

Beth sat up quickly. "Truly?" she demanded, with the energy of disappointment.

"Truly," answered Judith firmly.

"Good-night," said Beth abruptly. She rose and went away without a kiss. Then Judith lay for a long time awake: the line of cleavage was beginning. The choice was hard, hard!

But in the morning she wrote her invitations, after agreeing upon a date with Mrs. Harmon, who leaped at the chance. Yet she showed only too distinctly what people would think of the event.

"Haven't you," she inquired before Judith left, "haven't you something to tell me, Judith?"

"Nothing," answered Judith shortly. "Good-bye."

She wrote her notes in her father's name, puzzling first over the wording. It would be easy to trap people into coming, and when they arrived they could find Ellis of the party. But that seemed not to be fair; unconventionally she inserted in each note the words, "to meet Mr. Stephen F. Ellis." When the notes were written she took them out and dropped them quickly into the post-box, lest her courage should fail her. Thus it was settled! The notes were to the Fennos, the Watsons, Mr. and Miss Pease. Twenty-four hours, and the whole town would be discussing her. Twenty-four hours brought Saturday; in the morning Mr. Fenno came to the house.

He always interested her, for he meant power. Ellis, Pease, Fenno: such was their rank in the town; but Judith felt, as she welcomed him, that he was as a king about to abdicate, looking back on his reign with weary eyes, and measuring by a standard of his own. He was one to whom others were aggregations of forces—potentialities, not men. His heavy head with its thick hair and deep eyes reminded her more than ever of an old lion; the rumble of his voice gave force to his slightest word.

Judith told him she would send for Beth. "No, my dear," he said, "I am glad Beth is not here. I came to see you." With some wonder she led him into the parlour, where Mr. Fenno handed her a note and watched her while she read it. It was the usual short formula: "Mr. and Mrs. William Fenno regret that they cannot accept——," etc.

"I am sorry," said Judith as she folded up the paper.

"That is my wife's answer," explained Mr. Fenno. "I came to give you my own in person." But then he gazed at her in silence until she became restive under the scrutiny. "My dear Miss Judith," he said suddenly, "I like you very much."

"Mr. Fenno," she returned, "you scarcely know me."

"I have watched you a great deal," he replied. "I like your spirit, your rebellion against the stupid life we lead. Upon my word, I don't know what business your father has with two such daughters; he doesn't appreciate you, I'm sure. I'll change with him and welcome.—There, don't be offended with me. I come to beg you to be moderate. Remember that I speak to you with the voice of generations. Not even you can afford to disregard the wisdom of the fathers."

"I do not wish to," she answered, puzzled.

"My wife," he said, "would write that note and let

the matter pass. But I want to thank you, first, for so frankly putting your purpose in your invitation. 'To meet Mr. Ellis.' We might have come, indeed we should have come, but for that. But we can't mix with him, Miss Judith."

"It seems to me," she returned, "that the wisdom of the fathers usually means crystallisation, sir."

"My wife," he said, "is beyond crystallisation: she is dead. Of course she goes through the form of living. She called you 'that young woman' when she received the invitation, and wrote as you see, from the dead in heaven to the dead in—limbo. But, my dear girl, did you ever hear of me agreeing with my wife? Almost never! This time I did."

"Mr. Fenno——" began Judith.

"Let me go on," he begged. "Of course you understand what a declaration you are offering to your friends; what a choice as well. I know your opinion of us; we, Society, are irksome to you. Just as irksome to me, I assure you; I hate my own life. And yet we are a force; in spite of all appearances we are a force for good. Come, you and I are so far apart in age that we cannot be angry with each other. Let me say my say, and when we part let us smile and go our ways."

"Very well," she replied.

"Miss Judith," he said, "there has been an aristocracy in every democracy that lived three generations. Ours is very old, somewhat dried and formal, with a hard crust. Figureheads we are to a degree; rather useless, perhaps. That is why such a girl as you is a blessing to us; a few more years, and you can teach us many, many things. Stay with us; you mustn't go off in the wrong direction."

She made no answer.

"This man Ellis," he pursued. "You cannot bring

him in. Believe me, it is impossible. You must choose between us."

"What if I make the choice?" she inquired.

"And choose against us? You would be sorry. My dear, what has blinded your eyes? I know you admire his energy, his immense capacities. But those are not everything. Ellis is not honest."

"Mr. Fenno!" she cried, starting.

"I have watched him," he went on steadily, "since first he came to town. I know his methods. Where did he get his money?"

"Through ordinary business," she asserted.

"Until he became president of the street-railway," said Mr. Fenno with emphasis, "Ellis never held a position, never did any business, never appeared before the city clearly as concerned in any legitimate undertaking. Since he built his house over here he has become respectable—outwardly. But that house was built with public money."

"Never!" she cried indignantly.

"He has his own little Tammany here," Mr. Fenno said unmoved. "But he is becoming too bold. He will wreck himself by the demands he is making for the street-railway system."

"The public will be afraid of granting eminent domain; he expects that. For the rest, what else is he showing than wise forethought?"

"For the rest," he rejoined, his deep voice emphasising harshly, "he is but using the plans of George Mather, which came to him with the railway."

"No!" she cried involuntarily. He made no answer, but looked at her silently. "Mr. Fenno," she said, to cover her confusion, "this question is progress against conservatism."

"So," he remarked, "we have arrived at a deadlock.

Well, I expected it. Good-bye, Miss Judith. I shall be interested in the result of this." They parted formally, yet his last keen glance troubled her.

And what he had said! No one had ever accused Ellis before—not directly. Whispers she had heard, of course, but such quiet confidence as Mr. Fenno showed was new to her; it brought the question nearer home, and seemed to command her to find out where Ellis got his money. For some hours she was troubled, but at last, as one is prone to do before a great question, Judith put it aside for a smaller one. Whom should she ask in the Fennos' place? She decided that she would not venture again with the older people, and choosing George Mather and Mary Carr, wrote the notes to invite them. Then, late in the day, she found an answer to Mr. Fenno's arguments.

Her father approved of Ellis: that was enough. The defense was specious, almost cowardly, for Judith knew her father. But she regained her self-control, supported herself anew by the argument of progressiveness against conservatism, and arrived again at complete approval of Ellis. She recalled their last talk, remembered his request, and decided she would try to fulfill it. She had spent most of the day in the house; it was growing dark, she needed exercise, and would go and watch, at a certain crowded corner, the working of the transfer system. Once in the cold air, her spirits rose, and she hurried down town. At length she arrived where cars loaded to the fenders groaned slowly by, or stood and blocked the traffic.

The streets were full, the sidewalks crowded with people hurrying homeward. Judith liked the twilight, the bustle, and the lighted shops. At the familiar corner she found many shoppers waiting for their cars, and went and stood among them. She seemed to herself to be

doing something romantic, and (little as such considerations usually appealed to her) was pleased to stand among the people like a queen in disguise, to listen to their grievances, guilelessly expressed, and to bear the complaints to the man who best knew what was needed. It was an attractive picture which she painted of her own importance. But just as she was congratulating herself on the deepening dusk, which made features dim, an electric light sputtered out overhead and flooded the place with its palpitating radiance.

An acquaintance immediately recognised and spoke to her. Scarcely had she got rid of him than another, catching her eye, bowed and made toward her. "This will never do," she thought, as she gave him the slip. Accordingly, she went to a doorway where the shadow from the lamp was deep. There she stood and watched, while cars came and went, while men and women rushed and struggled to board them, or while others, moving impatiently with cold and weariness, waited and fretted while they read in vain the wording on each car. It was an active scene, a fascinating one to Judith, until a small figure came and stood between her and the others, aloof and watching, like herself. It was Ellis.

She was amused, and drew within her shelter lest he should see her: she would tease him when next they should meet. Then she saw another man, a fellow in rough working-clothes, watching Ellis from one side. Presently the man advanced to him and spoke; Judith did not hear their words until Ellis, turning, led the man away from the crowd until he stood within a few yards of her.

"Now, what did you say?" demanded Ellis, halting.

"I've never been paid, you know I've never been paid, sir, for that Chebasset job. Only fifty I've ever

got; I was to have a hundred." The man spoke in a whine; his voice was husky and in a degree familiar to Judith; as the light fell strongly from overhead, his hat cast a deep shadow on his face.

"That job failed," answered Ellis.

"I did my best," answered the man sullenly. Then he quickly changed his manner; his voice became sharp, yet still it reminded Judith of tones she once had heard. "Pay me!" he demanded. "Pay me, Mr. Ellis, or by God I'll have something to say to your men on those cars that will make this strike certain. If I tell them of Chebasset——"

"Wait!" and Ellis raised a hand. "How much truth is there in this talk of a strike among my men?"

"A good deal," snarled the fellow. "It wouldn't take much to bring it on."

"Thank you," said Ellis composedly. He put his hand in his pocket, drew out a roll of bank bills, and gave some to the man. "I am much obliged to you for the information."

"Fifty?" demanded the workman.

"Sixty," Ellis replied.

The man looked at Ellis, then at the notes; suddenly his bearing altered, and he touched his hat. "Thank you," he mumbled, and walked away. Ellis turned again to watch the cars.

Judith stood motionless; the talk meant nothing to her, except that it showed her Ellis's resource and revealed the small ways, as well as the great, in which he was called on to manage men. Nevertheless, she felt uncomfortable, and when Ellis had moved away she prepared to slip off. But before her path was entirely clear she saw Jim Wayne approach and speak to Ellis. In Jim's appearance was that which struck her with astonishment.

For he, usually so neat, was untidy; his coat was buttoned askew, and from under his hat his hair strayed in disorder. He accosted Ellis eagerly; she heard him say "Here you are" in a tone of relief, and began speaking quickly. Judith took a step forward, preparing to go. But then Ellis turned and led Jim near the doorway; Judith's chance to escape was lost, yet she was on the point of revealing herself, when Jim's words stayed her.

"You must! You must!" he was saying, in such a tone of actual demand that Judith wondered and shrank back. Few persons dared to speak to Ellis thus.

"Must?" repeated Ellis angrily. But then he laughed. "Wayne, you have no claim on me."

"Who gave me the idea?" cried Jim. "Who told me what to do? You! But it is gone—all gone!" The gesture with which he struck his hands together revealed both horror and despair.

"Your wits as well," returned Ellis shortly. "If you want help from a man, don't begin by insulting him."

"But something must be done at once!" cried Jim. "If Mather——"

"I understand that he went to Chebasset this morning," remarked Ellis as if indifferently, yet he glanced sidewise upon the young man. "He returned very much disturbed."

"There!" exclaimed Jim. "He has found it out!" Again he clenched his hands with that gesture of despair. Judith felt that something was hanging over him, over her, and in spite of herself drew deeper into the shadow.

"Mather can be quieted," said Ellis, unperturbed. "Come, this is no place for you to carry on like this. Meet me this evening."

"Where?"

"At—some one's house. Half-past nine."

"It must be earlier," returned Jim.

"Then come to the Blanchards; I mean to dine there."

"No," answered Jim, "I can't go there. But promise me to come away early!"

"I will come when I choose," answered Ellis impatiently. Then he added: "Go! I see Mather."

Jim turned and darted off, holding his head low. Ellis walked composedly in the opposite direction; and to Judith, thus left alone, the sound of the shuffling of the crowd, the rumbling of the electrics, the subdued roar of the more distant traffic, rose suddenly into life. She moved forward, saw that her escape was clear, and hurried away. At the next corner she found a public carriage and directed the driver to take her home.

The vehicle was closed; she let down a window and leaned to it for the air. What were these matters she had overheard? The episode of the workman passed from her mind, but what had Jim demanded of Ellis, what had gone wrong, and where were they to meet? They were far more intimate than she had supposed. And why had Jim avoided Mather? Weariness came over Judith as she considered her own ignorance. These were the things which men did by themselves; these were the signs of those business troubles which women heard of but never met, the smirch and jostle of downtown affairs. Such things happened daily—and Judith roused to a feeling of envy. Little daily worries and cares—the men had too many of them, doubtless, but she had far too few.

And now, as still she leaned by her window, she saw Mather. He was on a corner, full in the glare of a street-light, and he seemed to be looking among the passers as if in search of Jim. The carriage jolted slowly across the cobbles and the tracks; then, blocked by vehicles in

front, it stopped almost at his side. Judith drew back, but still she watched him. Tall, strong, somewhat anxious and overburdened, why could he not be—different?

A woman stood by his side, or rather a girl with a woman's haggard eyes. She was looking up sidewise into Mather's face, studying it with a vixenish eagerness. She touched him on the arm, and he looked down at her.

"Say," she said, "you're a good-lookin' feller."

He answered soberly. "Thank you."

"Isn't there some place," she asked, "where we could eat together?"

His hand went to his pocket. As he made the motion a figure, large, noiseless, with gleaming buttons on a blue uniform, approached and stood close behind: a policeman, watching curiously. Mather drew out a bank note and offered it to the girl.

"With that," he asked, "can you be good for a few days?"

"W'at yer mean?" she demanded. But she snatched the money. "Ah, you're a real swell, you are."

"Go home," he said. "Go home—Jenny."

"Jenny!" she exclaimed. "How'd yer know my name?" Then as if warned of the presence behind she turned and saw the policeman, shrank, and fled. The roundsman and Mather regarded each other.

"Did you know her, sir?" asked the man.

"Never saw her before," was the answer. "You don't read Rossetti, I suppose, officer. Here comes my car."

He stepped from the curb to go behind Judith's carriage; at the same moment the vehicle started with a jerk and went swiftly forward. For a little longer it was involved in the city traffic, then it turned into a

quiet street and bowled onward quickly. Once more Judith leaned at the window, glad of the cold air. She was oppressed; to-night life seemed complicated, awful, even tragic.

CHAPTER XXIII

PLAIN LANGUAGE

ONCE at home, where Beth and the Colonel were still absent, Judith went to the book-case in the little parlour and drew out the volume of Rossetti's poems. "Jenny," she found in the index, and turning to the page, she read:

"Lazy laughing languid Jenny,
Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea——"

No, not that kind of a Jenny was that whom she had seen. Rather this:

"When, wealth and health slipped past, you stare
Along the streets alone, and there,
Round the long park, across the bridge,
The cold lamps at the pavement's edge
Wind on together and apart,
A fiery serpent for your heart."

And then the moral, the world-moral, this:

"Like a toad within a stone
Seated while Time crumbles on;
Which sits there since the world was curs'd
By man's transgression at the first; .
Which always—whitherso the stone
Be flung—sits there, deaf, blind, alone;—
Aye, and shall not be driven out
Till that which shuts him round about
Break at the very Master's stroke,
And the dust thereof vanish as smoke,
And the seed of Man vanish as dust:—
Even so within this world is Lust."

Judith sat with the book open in her lap, meditating. She knew enough of that lower life to have for it a man's pity rather than a woman's scorn; recalling Mather's action, she liked him better for it. And she began to think of him regretfully, as one who just missed the highest capacities and so failed to meet the supreme tests. "A fine fellow!" she murmured, so absorbed that she did not hear the door-bell ring, nor notice footsteps until Mather himself entered the room with hurried step. He wore his overcoat; on his brow was still the frown of care.

"Ah," he said, "I am glad to find you. Is Jim Wayne here, Judith?"

She rose and laid the book aside, carefully, so that he should not see what she had been reading. "No," she answered. "It is his night to come. But I saw him down town, George, and he looked worried. Is anything wrong?"

"It has been a bad day in stocks," he answered. "I must find Jim. Excuse my troubling you, Judith." And he moved toward the door.

"Wait, George." She took from the table the note which earlier she had written him. "I have an invitation for you."

He took it, opened it, and began to read. "Ah!" he said at first, as if with pleasure. But as she watched she saw a quick and startling change in his countenance; his forehead contracted with pain, and he closed his lips firmly. But he read on to the end, and then looked at her quietly.

"I cannot come," he said.

With a conscious summoning of her courage she asked, "You have an engagement?"

"No," he replied. "But I cannot march in Ellis's triumph,"

"You are entirely mistaken," she said haughtily.

"If not yet, then soon," he returned. She made no answer, yet she flushed with indignation; he bowed and turned to the door. Then he came back. "Judith, will you allow me to speak with you frankly? A few words may make a difference to us forever."

It was not the words which impressed her, it was the emotion which drove them from his breast, which burned in his eyes. She was so astonished that she made no answer; he said, to emphasise his request, "It may be seldom that we speak again."

"Seldom speak again?" she repeated.

He took her words for a consent. "Judith," he asked, "what is this man Ellis to you? Do you realise that he is using you?"

Her indignation rose. "Using me!"

"To get among us," he explained. "He has no gratitude, no remorse. Once he has used a man he throws him aside like an old glove; he has never shown personal feeling for any one. Why do you have to do with him?"

"You envy his ability," she said.

"Not I," he answered. "I admire his firmness, his persistence, his capacity. But I cannot admire him. Judith, he is a bane, a poison in our system, a disease!"

"You mistake him," she cried.

"Not I. I know him, and am going to fight him."

"Fight him, then!" she returned.

He spoke more quietly. "We have been careless with him; he has brought corruption into the city. But small cities are not so conscienceless as big ones; the better elements are rising against him. This day I was formally asked to lead them, and I shall probably be against his man in the mayoralty contest next fall.

It is a battle of principles: that is why I can never take salt with him."

She was quite unmoved, using her previous defense. "It will be a struggle of the new against the old."

"Ah, Judith," he replied almost sadly, "is he blinding you thus? And do you see my meaning clearly? All the better elements will oppose him. Whoever is with him will be against us."

"Who are you," she cried, "to pronounce on good and evil? Take care against self-righteousness, George."

"I will take care," he answered. "But there is another side to this, Judith. Put this larger issue by and turn to the smaller, the personal one between you and me. Judith, I have loved you. I thought you were womanly at bottom. But have you no heart, after all?" His intensity was growing.

"That still troubles you?" she inquired.

"Are you absolutely cold?" he asked. "Are your old friends nothing to you? What if they turn from you?"

"So," she said, "you threaten me with that?"

"It is inevitable," he said with energy. "Even as my love—no boy's love, Judith—wavers and grows sick, so will their friendship. Have we all mistaken you? Will you give such approval to such a man?"

Anger at last grew strong within her. "George!" she said in warning.

But he, casting before her his burning reproaches, would not be repressed. "I say the only thing which can bring you to yourself. Do my words sting? They tear me as I utter them!" His face was changing as he spoke, paling as if the effort weakened him, yet still he dragged out the words. "Judith, I could see you married to an honourable man, and still love and bless you. I will idealise you until you besmirch yourself—

but you are no child, to do that unknowingly. On the day you give yourself to Ellis——”

“Stop!” she interrupted.

“No!” he cried. “It is in your mind; you cannot deny it. On the day, Judith, that you give yourself to him, you sell yourself!”

He stood voiceless and panting, gazing at her with accusing eyes. And for an instant she reeled, a voice within her cried “Jenny!” and she saw that woman of the streets. Then fierce indignation flooded her veins; she started to the table, seized the Japanese knife, and held it naked in her hand. With ease she balanced and pointed the heavy weapon.

“Do you suppose,” he asked, “that you can hurt me deeper?”

For a moment they stood confronting, his courage as strong as her anger. Then she threw the dagger clattering upon the table, and pointed to the door. “Go!”

He gave her one searching look, bowed, and went quickly from the house.

The Colonel, entering some fifteen minutes later, found Judith in the arm-chair where she had flung herself after pacing the room. “Judith,” he said, “I met Mr. Ellis just now, and he said he was coming up to dinner.”

“Very well,” she answered inattentively.

He saw that her brow was clouded, and his desire to speak with her seriously began to melt. When he was alone it seemed to him simple enough to say a few fatherly words in favour of Ellis; the Colonel wished very much to have his mind relieved about the future. But now was not the time, not while that frown was on her face. So he went up-stairs.

Then his statement found its way into Judith’s mind, and she sprang to her feet. Ellis was coming—

then *it* was coming! She hurried up-stairs and dressed herself with care; when she was ready she was a picture. But it was not her gown and scanty jewels that made her radiant, but the glow within her, which was the smouldering indignation she still felt against Mather. Thus to threaten, thus to dare her, thus to set himself up as judge! She waited impatiently for Ellis to come.

CHAPTER XXIV

BRINGING ABOUT AN UNDERSTANDING

BETH was much disappointed that evening; it was Saturday, yet Jim did not come to dinner. She wished for him especially as a relief from the irritation of Ellis's presence; she longed for Jim as the meal progressed, for her father was very complacent to Ellis, and it troubled her. But Ellis was a greater cause of distress, as he spoke more than usual, and more directly at Judith. They were talking of politics, he and the Colonel. Municipal affairs, Judith put in; what was the prospect in them?

"A fight," answered Ellis, "and with the man I least like as my opponent: your friend, George Mather. I expect he will be the reform candidate for mayor—it is too bad!"

"Why?" asked Beth.

"Because," he answered, turning to her, "I should like to be friends with him. If he and I could agree, nothing could stand before us. He is the most energetic and far-sighted among the other side."

"Come over to him, then," said Beth bluntly.

He smiled at her. "I see that you think as Mather does. It's very natural. But I have not only the misfortune to be with—well, let's say the commoner people, but I also believe as they believe, and act as I do from conviction. Nothing would give me greater pleasure, Miss Blanchard, than to see things as you do, and to set myself, as I believe Mr. Mather conscientiously

does, against progress. There would be great personal advantage to me in it."

"Mr. Ellis means," explained the Colonel, "that the defensive is always the easiest side to fight on."

"More than that," added Ellis. "The other side in this quarrel is the respectable one. Positively, I am almost disreputable." He paused for her comment; Beth smiled with constraint, amazed at his boldness.

"Outwardly, you mean," said Judith.

"And only outwardly, I trust," he responded. "There are underlying principles governing my actions (he was speaking to Beth again, after turning to Judith for a single moment) which unfortunately do not appear. I expect to be misunderstood by your friends."

"Always?" asked Beth. "Are not the rest of us to comprehend you some day, Mr. Ellis?"

"Let me show you," he said, "how to comprehend me now." He leaned toward her, smiling; for the first time Beth felt a magnetic quality in his glance, but it was reptilian and unpleasant. He told her of his outlook on the future; he grated on her, yet he impressed her, for even with opponents such as Ellis she was reasonable. But she felt a fundamental falsity, felt it but could not expose it; it was instinct alone that taught her suspicion of his unanswerable words. For no logic could meet them; they were wisdom itself. Of one thing, however, Beth felt certain: that they were not directed at her but at Judith.

And Judith responded. When Ellis stopped speaking, she took up the word; with real earnestness she explained, added, and finally approved. The plan was wise, far-reaching—oh, thought Beth, if but Mather, and not Ellis, had been the man to originate it! Then Beth started: had she not once heard that Mather had made plans, perhaps just such as these, at which the

older heads had wondered? Although on mere conjecture, she took up the matter as boldly as she could.

"I did not know, Mr. Ellis, that you were such an engineer."

"I am only a promoter," he answered. "You will find the opposition newspapers calling me that. But I often handle large matters, and that is how I came on the idea."

"You mean you found it?" she asked. "Did you not originate it?"

Ellis flushed and hesitated; Judith spoke quickly. "I don't suppose anything in the world is so original that it hasn't been proposed before. Mr. Ellis, Beth, is profiting by the experience of other cities—aren't you?" And Judith turned to him.

Gratified, he assented. Beth saw the glance of understanding that passed between them; turning to her father, she saw him watching Judith with satisfaction. She felt almost faint: how was the world going so wrong that this could happen? Nothing was left for Beth but to declare, as brightly as she could—yet Judith felt the distress in her voice—that this was all so new that she must think it over. After that she sat silent.

But Judith, having expressed her zeal in Ellis's cause, was more than ever pleased with herself and with him. It struck her particularly that he was generous toward Mather, that it was kind of Ellis to praise him and desire him as an ally, and that, contrasting with Mather's denunciation of his rival, Ellis showed the finer character. She was about to question him again when the servant brought a note and laid it at her plate.

"The messenger asked me to deliver it to you at once, Miss Judith."

Judith took it up; it was addressed in Mather's hand.

Her instant impulse to destroy it he had foreseen, for in the corner of the envelope he had written "Not personal." So, still flushing with the indignation she had first felt, she opened the envelope and took out the note. It was written on the paper of the University Club.

"*My dear Judith*: I must find Jim Wayne, but Beth must not know. Trusting absolutely to your secrecy, I give my reasons. Matters have been mismanaged at the mill; and just now, calling on Mrs. Wayne, I found her in despair over the disappearance of her securities. I fear that Jim has been speculating, and I am sure he is avoiding me, but I must find him before he takes it into his head to leave the city, for perhaps I can set matters right. If he comes to your house, will you immediately telephone me at the club? I am

Yours in great haste,

GEORGE MATHER."

Judith was not one to be disturbed by sudden news, bad or good; she took this calmly. But as she sat, still looking at the letter, its meaning began to come upon her. Jim had been with Ellis that afternoon, had had some previous understanding with him, had almost accused him. Jim had fled at Mather's coming, leaving unsaid more of those reproaches and demands with which he had showered Ellis. His very words came back to her: "Who gave me the idea? Who told me what to do?" Then she remembered Ellis's cold remark: "Wayne, you have no claim upon me."

Not understanding why, Judith began to tremble, and her hands grew cold. It was as if her instinct outstripped her mind and gave warning of what was coming. Slowly, sitting there in her place and looking straight before her, she began to unravel the puzzle. Ellis looked at her once, curiously; then Beth, seeing the glance and noting Judith's absorption, took her place in the conversation. Judith thought on. If

Jim had speculated, had Ellis known? Had Ellis led him into it? Once in, did Ellis refuse to help him? She recalled what Mather had said of Ellis discarding his tools. But how could Jim be of use to him, except—yes!—as a handle, a hold on her through Beth! And was this Ellis's method of bringing Jim into his power? She heard again the boy's despairing words: "Who gave me the idea?"

She looked at Ellis: what was this wild suspicion? Could it be true?

Beth, not knowing what else to speak about, had made him talk of the suggested strike. Ellis had laughed about it. There would be no strike.

"Why," he was saying as Judith looked at him, "the air seems charged with strike-talk sometimes, yet nothing comes of it. Now that I think of it," and he paused to laugh, "a man tried blackmail on me this afternoon. He was a fellow I once had to do with when we were both younger, a crank if ever there was one. He has ideas of the rights of the workingman, yet he is far from honest. He came to me with the statement that he could bring on the strike if he wished—with his socialistic talk, you understand. He wished me to pay him to keep from haranguing my men."

"Did you do it?" Judith suddenly demanded.

"No, no," he said lightly. "A mere agitator, he could do no harm."

"An agitator?" asked Beth, interested. "Why, there was such a man at George's mill this summer. Don't you remember, Judith. He tried to bring about a strike there. I wonder if it was the same man, Mr. Ellis. Was his name Stock?"

Judith had watched steadily. At Beth's first words Ellis had changed, hardened, made his face stone. But at the name—did he not control a start? Yet

he answered with indifference. "Oh, no. There are many such fellows. It is quite another man."

But he glanced at Judith, and though he did it quietly and steadily, as once he had described his habit to be, she recalled the conversation which she had overheard, and understood it all. She *had* known the voice, the husky tones which became harsh when raised. She remembered the words, the Chebasset job for which money had been promised, yet which had failed. And Ellis had paid—had paid! The meanness, the whole base plot, was revealed to her.

The servant had come with the dessert, but Judith rose from her chair; her face was white. "I cannot eat any more," she said. "You must excuse me."

"Is anything——" began her father.

"I must go," she said, and went into the parlour, wishing only to be alone and think, to despise herself at leisure. Ellis had revealed not only himself, but also her blind folly. She cast herself upon the sofa and put her face in her hands.

Then she heard his footsteps; he had followed. He crossed the room; she felt him sit beside her, and she heard his voice. He spoke gently. "Miss Judith—Judith!" He took her hand to draw it from her face.

His touch was a disgrace, but she yielded her hand to his; she wished his fingers might burn like fire, to brand her punishment. Writhing in spirit as she felt herself unclean, for very scorn would not resist him.

"Judith," he repeated, his hope rising, "you are not ill?"

"No." She turned and looked upon him resolutely; she would see once more this man whom she had admired.

"If anything I have said," he went on, "if I have—oh, did it come over you then so strongly that you

left the table? Did you feel that we are made for each other?"

She withdrew her hand quickly. "Made for each other!"

His face changed, the eagerness was checked, and he said the conventional words, conventionally: "I love you."

She looked into him: how small he was! How cold his voice, which should have been impassioned! "Love me?" she asked. "You love crooked ways!"

Slowly he rose. "What is this?" he asked.

"I so felt our—sympathy, that I left the table? Oh, yes, yes!" Scorn overcame her; again she hid her face. Oh, but to die from the strength of this hatred of herself!

She heard him walk away; then he returned and stood before her. "I do not understand you," he said. "I have been foolish, perhaps, but I told the truth. I do feel that we are made for each other. Will you marry me?"

Her contempt of him left her; she loathed only herself. All through this acquaintance he had been his natural man; it was she who had deceived herself. For that she could not punish him. "I cannot marry you," she answered.

His effort at self-control was visible, but it succeeded. "I beg," he said, "that you will give me time. If I have been hasty——"

"No," she said, rising and facing him. "Mr. Ellis, I acknowledge that I have treated you badly; I am as sorry as I can be. Can I say more than that? Yes, I beg you to forgive me. But I can never marry you."

He pressed his lips firmly together; his brows contracted, and he looked at her out of those narrow eyes which could control his subordinates or threaten his

opponents. But she met him with sorrow, not defiance, and he could not understand.

"What has happened?" he cried. "Yesterday—this very day——"

"You were sure of me?" she asked. "Rightly, Mr. Ellis. But now it is too late."

"What is it, then? Has that fellow Mather——?"

"Yourself only," she interrupted. "I beg you to leave me."

He looked at her a moment longer; then he left the room. But not the house: she heard him go to the dining-room and speak to her father. Then Beth came into the parlour quickly; she was agitated.

"Judith——"

"Not now, Beth," and Beth left her again.

There was a pause, and then her father came; she heard his dragging step. When he appeared he showed the last shreds of his natural feeling—shame that at Ellis's order he should come to advise his child.

"Judith," he began, "Mr. Ellis tells me that—that you——"

"I have declined to marry him," she said.

"Why is this?" he asked. "It has seemed so plain that you would take him."

Judith hung her head. Had it then been so plain? "I have changed."

"Come," said the Colonel with an attempt at briskness. "You can't mean this. There's nothing against Ellis that I can see."

"Nothing?" she asked. "And you say that, father? What will our friends say?"

"Girls marry out of their station," he urged uneasily. "We can bring him in, Judith."

"Father," she demanded, "what hold has he on you, to make you say this?"

"Hold?" he asked. "My dear child, there is nothing of the sort." But when the truth was thrust directly at him the Colonel was a poor actor.

"There is something between you," Judith said.

"I have come to see Mr. Ellis in a different light," he explained. "That is all there is to it."

"Father," cried Judith, "tell me!"

He turned away from her and began to walk up and down, but she held his sleeve and stopped him.

"Father!" she beseeched.

He tried to meet her eye, and failed; he looked at the carpet and shifted his feet. But still he felt her insistent grasp upon his arm, and at last he spoke huskily.

"Judith, I owe him money."

"Oh!" she gasped, and fell away from him. "Father, what have you done?" Yet feeling that she had not even the right to reproach him, she said no more. As she stood with bowed head, he took courage.

"You see," he said, "why it must be."

"Must be?" she demanded. "Oh, father, does that make it inevitable?"

"Judith," he asked her, startled. "Do you mean that you—you won't?"

"How much do you owe him?" she questioned with energy.

"Some thousands."

"Well," she said, "what are four or five thousand? We can sell the house and live differently."

He looked his alarm. "It is more than five," he said.

"Nearer ten thousand."

"The house is worth more than that," she responded.

"But to leave this place?" he objected. "Judith, this is absurd, unreasonable! Where could we go?"

"Go anywhere!" she answered. "Live as we must. Father, you can work."

"Work?" he gasped. "I—work?"

"Then I will support you. Beth and I."

"No, no!" he said in despair. "I couldn't stand it; I couldn't exist. At my age; think of that!" and his tone turned to pleading.

She heard a footstep at the threshold, and there was Ellis. He entered and spoke to her. "I couldn't wait. Miss Blanchard, has not your father persuaded you?"

She turned upon him with flaming eye. "How did you first persuade him? Did you offer to release his debt?"

"So," he snarled to the Colonel, "you have told!"

The Colonel stepped away from the venomous gleam of his teeth. "She made me," he stammered.

"Made you!"

"There is no advantage in discussing this, Mr. Ellis," said Judith.

"Do not count it against me," he urged quickly. "Your father came to me of himself, asking for help. I did it for you."

"You would have served me better by refusing. But Mr. Ellis, the money shall be paid."

"Paid with money?" he asked. With clenched hands he turned upon the Colonel. "Oh, you fool!"

"Father!" cried Judith, and stepped between them to restrain the burst of military wrath which should cast Ellis from the house. But to her amazement her father stood motionless, almost cringing. Then first she recognised the slow degeneration which in all these years had been going on beneath the unchanged exterior. "Father!" she said again, but now in pity, and took her place at his side. She felt, as he made a little movement toward her, his gratitude for the protection—another revelation of his loss of manliness. "Mr. Ellis, there is nothing further to say."

"Oh, you have led me on to this!" he cried. "Was it put up between you? Such a way to gain money!"

Instinctively she took her father's arm, to hold him; again he proved, by his passivity, that his spirit was all gone. "Will you leave us?" she asked coldly.

"Oh!" Ellis cried, shaking with anger and carried away. "You put it on well! Because I am not one of you, you tricked me, then? And was it Mather all the time? But my turn is coming!" He would have said more, but she left her father and went toward the door. Then he saw how hopelessly he was cutting himself off from her. "Oh, forgive me—Judith! I am frantic."

But she turned at the door, and standing like an angry goddess, pointed into the hallway. "Go!" she commanded.

"Miss Blanchard!" he exclaimed in consternation.

"Go!"

His hold on her was gone forever; he saw it, and his venom returned. He went swiftly to her father; she did not hear the words that Ellis hissed. "I have bought up the mortgages on this house; you know they are long overdue. Monday I turn you out!"

With delight he saw the Colonel flinch, but by no effort of resolution could Ellis meet the glance of the haughty figure at the door. Yet as he passed her Judith quailed and shivered, for by the same commanding gesture she had sent Mather from the house.

CHAPTER XXV

THE COLONEL GIVES UP HIS LUXURIES

THE Colonel pulled himself together. Ellis was gone, and relieved from that oppressive influence Blanchard held up his head. He tried to smile, and found that he succeeded fairly well. He tested his voice; it came as usual, sonorously.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, "the fellow's gone."

"Father," answered Judith, "you and I have both done wrong."

He waved his hand impatiently; would her confounded straightforwardness not let him forget? "Never mind."

"Never mind?" she repeated. "Father, we can't put this aside for a single minute. We must plan at once what shall be done."

"You always were fiery," he said indulgently. "Well, go ahead."

"We need Beth," and Judith went to call her in. Beth came, white with apprehension, having heard tones but not words, and feeling rather than knowing that there was trouble. She sought to learn all from one question. "Where is Mr. Ellis?"

"Gone," answered Judith. "He will not come here again."

"Oh," she cried, "I am glad. Then why so grave?"

"Mr. Ellis," her sister said, "has gone away very angry, and father owes him money." Then she looked

upon the Colonel with sudden suspicion. "Father, you said *about* ten thousand dollars. Was it more?"

"My dear child," he protested, "this matter is not so great as you suppose. And I cannot tell you all of my affairs."

"Father," she returned, "for my sake, if not for yours, Mr. Ellis should be paid at once."

He rebuked her. "I know how to keep our honour clean. Mr. Ellis shall be paid at once."

"You promise that, sir?"

"I do."

"And will it mean that we must sell the house?"

"It will." The Colonel always excelled in the delivery of monosyllables.

"Sell the house?" gasped Beth.

"Come here, dear," said Judith, and drew her to her side. "Beth, you have plenty of courage, I know."

"I hope so." Pleased by the unusual caress, Beth controlled her trembling. "What are you planning, Judith?"

"We must entirely change our way of life." Judith looked to her father for confirmation; he nodded. "Are you willing to work, Beth?"

"I am willing," was the confident answer.

"Father," Judith asked, "how much will the house bring?"

"Come here," he answered. "Let me tell you what we must do."

He went to the sofa; they followed. Beth took the place he indicated at his side; Judith sat in a chair. The Colonel, still smiling, looked on them paternally, and began to depict in words his ready imaginings.

"When the house is sold and the debt is paid," he said, "we shall have left—let me see, perhaps twenty thousand dollars. I don't need to explain," he inter-

rupted himself to say, "that had not other resources previously failed me—mismanagements and losses, dears, not from my fault—I should never have turned to Mr. Ellis for assistance. No, no; of course you understand that. Therefore, the house is our only source of capital. Well, twenty thousand left: that would mean perhaps a thousand dollars a year to house and feed and clothe us. Yes, perhaps a thousand." The Colonel clung to the *perhaps*; it was covering a lie, several lies. "You see, we shall really be in difficulties."

"Yes," murmured Beth.

The Colonel warmed to his task. "Now, you are both young; on the other hand I am not old, and I am a soldier. The habit of courage, girls, I learned in my youth. So we are well equipped. But, only a thousand dollars! That will pay rent; perhaps it will pay for food. And our clothes, our little knick-knacks, we must earn for ourselves."

"Shall we take an apartment?" asked Beth, for Judith remained silent, watching her father intently. "One of the new ones they have been putting up?"

"Ah, no," he said kindly. "They cost five hundred a year, my child. This must be something of an emigration, Beth: this quarter of the town is no longer for us. But there are very respectable, quiet neighbourhoods where we can go; and even houses, not apartments, that we can rent. Does that dismay you?"

Beth pressed his hand. "No, father, no!"

He avoided Judith's steady look, and smoothed Beth's hair. "Servants—I don't think we can afford them. One of you two must do the housework. Which shall it be?"

"I!" Beth answered promptly.

"Cooking, dishwashing, sweeping," he warned her. "Are you really willing?"

"If you will be patient with my mistakes."

"My dear little girl, I am proud of you. Judith, is she not fine?" But still he kept his eyes upon the pleased and blushing Beth. "And we two others will earn the money."

"I am sorry," responded Beth. Then she brightened. "But, father, need it be so bad as this? You know so much of affairs; you can command a good salary at once."

"Remember," he said, "that I have failed. The world has gone against me. No one will have use for me. A clerk or a bank messenger—that is the most I can look to be."

"No, no!" cried Beth, shocked.

"It is natural," he said with resignation. "And perhaps Judith, with her talents and her typewriter, before long will be supporting all three of us." For the first time Judith heard his natural tone, in this reminder of his many little flings. "And we will all economise!"

"It will not be hard," Beth said.

"No," was the paternal response, "because we shall be doing it together. Think—some little four-room cottage. Perhaps not all the modern improvements, but never mind. We leave you early in the morning, Judith and I; we take the crowded electrics with all the other people going to their work. Judith snatches a few minutes to go to a bargain sale; I, at a ready-made-clothing store, fit myself to a twelve-dollar suit. Then we work hard all day, we three—and perhaps it will be hardest for you, Beth, to be so much alone. But at night we meet over the simple meal you have prepared, and go early to bed, fatigued by our day."

Even Beth saw how far this was from the Colonel's nature. "Father, it will be hardest for you."

"No worse," he replied, "than the Wilderness cam-

paign. Never you fret, dear; I can resign my luxuries. And if our friends over here sometimes speak of us with pity, we shall not meet them often enough to feel hurt when they do not recognise us in our cheap clothes."

"Father," cried Beth. "Our friends will stand by us. You shall see!"

"They will patronise us," he answered. "Shall we care for that? Especially Judith." And he turned to her at last.

"I can stand anything," she replied. "I am glad that you have foreseen all this, father."

"Did you doubt me?" he asked. He rose, and the girls rose with him. "But now I must go to my room; I must make a beginning on my new life. Good-night, Beth. Kiss me. Kiss me, Judith. Dears," he said, gazing on them affectionately, "we have had little dissensions from time to time, but I promise never to quarrel with you more. No, don't reply; I know you will be as forbearing toward me. Good-night; I am going to my study." He went to the door, and paused a moment. "Judith, did you really doubt me? You shall see what I can do."

Waving them a final good-night, he was gone. He climbed the stair briskly at first; then his step became slower, and his head bowed. In his study he sank into a chair and passed his hand across his forehead, where the perspiration had already started out. That had been an effort, but it was over, and now——!

He was sitting alone in this little room; like shadows his thoughts closed in on him. No, he had not lied; he had said *perhaps*. But the house was mortgaged to its full value, Ellis held the mortgages, and the interest was long overdue. The furniture was pledged. Monday, owning nothing but the clothes on his back, he would be turned into the street. Judith had failed him;

everything had failed him. Life, so pleasant, had played him false at last; there was no outlook any more. Slowly, without spirit, consumed with self-pity, he took pen and paper and began to write. How little there was to say! The letter was finished all too soon.

In the parlour the two girls sat and spoke together. "How brave of father!" Beth said.

Judith answered, "I never saw him less like himself."

"He is a new man," Beth explained. "He is setting us an example. We must work, and be a credit to him."

Judith's energy returned. She would work, she said. The typewriter was her own; it was paid for. She would apply herself to master it. Were they still rich, even then she would go to work. She must occupy herself, and forget. And as for Beth, before long Jim would come and claim her.

Then Judith remembered Mather's note, and the trouble deepened. If Jim had gone wrong, how would Beth, innocent Beth, bear that? She stole a glance at her sister. Beth was listening.

"Father, is that you?" she called.

The Colonel's voice answered from the hall. "I just came down for something." They heard him go upstairs again.

"He came down very quietly," said Beth. "I heard him in the back parlour. Poor father! He is very brave."

Then both sat silent, thinking. "We have good blood," said Judith at last with a tremor of pride in her voice. "We will show we are not afraid of what may happen."

"Yes," Beth answered. "—Hush, what was that?"

"I heard nothing," Judith said.

Beth's eyes grew larger as she sat rigid. "It was a groan," she whispered. "Listen!"

Then they both heard it, unmistakable, coming from the floor above. They started up, but stood in fear, questioning each other with their eyes. Again it came, but feebler, like a deep sigh.

"Father!" cried Judith, and hastened to the stairs. Up they hurried; they were breathless when they reached the study door. There they halted, transfixed.

The Colonel had finished his letter; it lay on the desk by his side. He reclined in the easy-chair as if asleep, but from his breast stood out the handle of the Japanese knife.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH JUDGE HARMON ENTERS THE STORY

JUDITH stood waiting at the telephone; at the Club the waiter had gone to fetch Mather. How slow he was in coming! How tired she felt! The wires sang in her ears; she heard faint voices speaking indistinctly; she had a dull consciousness of surrounding space, of connection with far-off spheres, out of which those voices rose, whispered, almost became articulate, then died away to let the humming of the spheres begin again. Then some man said loud and briskly: "Hello!"

"I am using the line," said Judith.

The man begged her pardon and drifted across the Styx, from whose dim territory a tinkling voice spoke complainingly for a while, then faded away. The buzzing in the wires increased the confusion in her head, and Judith, very, very weary, found herself clinging to the instrument lest she should fall. With a strong effort she regained her self-control.

Then she heard in the telephone sounds as of distant heavy strokes of metal; they grew louder, then the wire clicked. Mather spoke: "Hello!"

"Oh, George!" she gasped. His voice was calm, quiet, perfectly modulated, as if he stood there at her side. She released her hold on the instrument; with him talking so to her she could stand alone.

"That is you, Judith? Jim is there?"

"Jim?" She had forgotten him. "Oh, no."

"Then can I do anything for you?"

"Something has happened here," she said, "to—to father. He left a letter addressed to you and Mr. Pease."

"*Left* a letter?" She heard the change in his voice.

"Tell no one, please," she begged. "We telephoned for Mr. Pease and learned that he is at Judge Harmon's; Beth has gone there for him. Can you come? At once, George?"

"Instantly," he answered. "That is all?"

"All. Good-bye."

She heard him hang up his receiver. In her turn she left the telephone, and stronger in the knowledge that he was coming she began to pace the room. Pease too was coming; Beth would bring him soon.

But Pease, who had started for the Judge's, had turned aside at the foot of the steps when he saw Ellis waiting in the vestibule. Pease, telling himself that he could return, had gone away half an hour before, and all who had entered the Harmon house that evening were Ellis and Jim Wayne.

Jim had come first—a wild, dishevelled Jim. He had wandered a good deal that day, after first leaving Chebasset in the morning and next spending much time at a ticker. He had not been home; he had not eaten, he had given Mather the slip a couple of times, and his moods had varied from fear to bold resolution, and then to sullen despair. But since in the light fluids of his nature hope easily beat up its accustomed surface-froth, he arrived at the Harmons' in a more cheerful mood, looking for the coming of Ellis to relieve him of the consequences of his folly. When Mrs. Harmon had drawn the portieres, and had begun to tell him how untidy he was, he explained matters with a laugh.

"Been sitting over my accounts," he said. "Forgot to brush my hair, did I? Here's a mirror; just look

away a moment, Mrs. Harmon, please, while I——” He began to arrange his hair with his fingers.

But she watched him. “I can’t lose a chance to see a man prink,” she said. “Tell me about the accounts, Mr. Wayne.”

“Upon my word,” he cried, “there’s one item I forgot to put down! Just like me; and so important, too!”

“What is it?” she inquired.

“The item, or the cost?”

“Both. Tell me.”

He set a condition. “One or the other, choose. Wait!” He went to his overcoat, which he had flung upon a chair, and drew a box from the pocket. “Now choose,” he directed, holding up the box.

“Oh,” she pouted, “that is one of Price’s boxes. I can’t know the cost if I am to see what you’ve bought. You’ll show it to me, won’t you?”

“You would like to see it?”

“Of course.”

“Then open it,” he said, giving her the box. “It’s for you.”

“For me?” and she opened the little case. “Oh, Mr. Wayne, a locket! What good taste you have—oh, and I didn’t see the chain!” Then she regarded him reproachfully. “Now, Jim, you know you really mustn’t.”

“Always call me Jim!” he directed. “Why mustn’t I?”

“Because you can’t afford it.”

“I can!” he asserted. “At least, I could when I bought it. I was three thousand to the good then.”

“Indeed?” she thought, “and what happened later?” Deciding that possession was worth securing, she snapped the chain around her neck. “And so you have had a very lucky day?”

"Well," explained Jim, "there was a steady rise at first. But then there came a couple of flurries, and the bottom dropped out of everything I held."

"And you lost much?"

"No, no," he said quickly. "I was watching; I got out at once. I'm not so very badly off, and Ellis said he'd help me straighten matters. He's coming here this evening."

She was much relieved, but covered her feeling by coquetting. "So that is all you came here for?"

"That isn't fair," cried Jim. "Didn't I bring the locket? Now Mrs. Harmon!" He tried to take her hand. After some resistance on her part, he succeeded.

Holding that plump and somewhat large assembly of digits, from which no manicurist had as yet been able to remove the fresh bright pink reminding of its earlier uses (for Mrs. Harmon had once done her sewing and washed her own clothes)—holding that hand, Jim felt more agitation than when he first held Beth's. And though he looked into wide-open eyes, which met his without a tremor of their lids or a suggestion of a downward glance, Jim was more thrilled than by the sweet confusion Beth so oft discovered, even to her accepted lover. This was rare; it quickened his blood; he was preparing to taste the ruby of those lips, when into his consciousness came the clang of the door-bell, which was of the good old-fashioned kind. Before the noise had well begun, Mrs. Harmon had withdrawn her hand and placed a chair between herself and her admirer, whose ardent glance had proclaimed his intention with such distinctness that (combined with the door-bell) it had alarmed her modesty. And although Jim, calculating that the servant could not reach the door for half a minute, pursued and begged her not to be so cruel, she laughed at him and maintained her dis-

tance until in the hall were heard the rustle of the maid's skirts and then the opening of the front door. Jim was so disgusted that even the appearance of Ellis did not at first recall him to a willing obedience of the laws of propriety. But when Ellis, from an abrupt entrance, as abruptly halted and fixed him with a scowl, Jim came back to himself.

"Oh," said Ellis, "I had forgot you."

"I—I don't want to trouble you, Mr. Ellis," replied Jim.

"But you'd like some four, five, six thousand to help you out, hey? That's what you've been waiting here for?"

"You said you'd help me, sir."

Ellis turned his unchanged scowl on Mrs. Harmon. "Better drop him, Lydia," he said. "He's an eternal fool."

"Stephen," she cried indignantly, "have you lost money, too? More than he has, I'm sure." He sneered, and she added, "Something's gone wrong with you, then, to make you so rude."

His frown became blacker still; he had been walking the streets, and came here in the hope of distraction only to be reminded of Judith. "Hold your tongue, Lydia," he said roughly. Then he surveyed Jim once more. "You little fool, get out of your scrape by yourself!" Grasping his hat as if he would crush its brim, he turned to go.

"Don't come again, Stephen," she flung after him, "until you've found your temper."

Yet the last glimpse of Ellis, as he departed, gave distress to poor Jim. "Why," he said helplessly, as the outer door closed. "Why, Mrs. Harmon, he—he said he'd help me!"

But such common preoccupations as money-difficulties

were, at this moment, foreign to Mrs. Harmon's mood. Jim had stirred her blood, she was glad that Ellis had gone. Now she moved nearer to the young man, so that the space between them was free. "Never mind," she said lightly.

"Never mind?" repeated Jim. "But Mrs. Harmon, I've ——" No, he couldn't tell her. Yet what should he do?

"Leave business for the daytime," she said. "Forget the mill; forget the office." She came nearer still.

Jim hung his head. Mather was after him surely; and what could he say to his mother?

"Stephen will come round," said Mrs. Harmon. "Leave him to me."

"Oh," cried Jim, "you will help me? Just a little, Mrs. Harmon?"

"Why should I?" she asked archly. She was very close now, and was looking in his eyes.

"For our friendship," he answered.

"Friendship!" she repeated. Her tone roused him; he looked, and her glance kindled his. "Only friendship?" she asked softly.

"Oh!" he breathed, and caught her in his arms.

Again came the cursed interruption of the jangling door-bell. "You shall not go!" he said, holding her fast. She murmured, "I do not wish to." They stood motionless, and heard the servant pass through the hall and open the front door. They listened, ready to spring apart.

"The Judge?" the servant asked. "Yes, in his study. This way." Again the footsteps and the rustling skirt passed the door. The two in the parlour waited until the door of the Judge's study opened and shut. Then Jim lowered his head upon the one that nestled at his shoulder.

"At last!" he whispered. And their lips met.

But Beth was in the Judge's study. Behind his table sat the old man—no, not so very old, in years only sixty, but he carried them ill. A life of labour among books, a disappointment in his wife, made him seem ten years older than he was. The Judge never exercised, was sometimes short of breath and dizzy, but was at all times scornful of the wisdom of doctors. His face was naturally stern, yet a smile came on it when he saw Beth. He rose, adjusted a different pair of glasses, and then saw the distress on her countenance.

"Why, Beth!" he exclaimed. "Is anything wrong?"

"Is Mr. Pease not here?" she asked in return.

"Pease? No, he has not been here."

"His cousin said," explained Beth, "that he was coming here. And so I came at once, since you have no telephone. Father—oh, Judge Harmon, my father has killed himself!"

The Judge turned white. "Killed?" He put his hand to his breast. "My dear child! My poor Beth! Killed himself? Oh, I am so sorry!"

"There is nothing to do," said Beth with admirable calmness. "But he left a letter directed to Mr. Mather and Mr. Pease."

"Mr. Pease is not here," the Judge repeated, much distressed. "Let me bring you home again.—But your Mr. Wayne was here earlier. Perhaps he is still in the parlour with my wife."

"Jim here?" cried Beth, springing to the door. "Oh, I hope he is!" Hastily she left the study, sped along the hall, and parted the parlour curtains. There were Jim and Mrs. Harmon, in the growing fierceness of their first embrace. Beth saw how eagerly they strained together, and heard their panting breaths.

She stood still and made no sound, but her senses

noted everything: Jim's hand that pressed on Mrs. Harmon's shoulder, her closed eyes, her hands linked behind his neck—and his sudden movement as he shifted his arm, only to press her closer. And still that clinging kiss continued, ecstatic, terrible. Beth could not move, could scarcely breathe, until behind her rose the Judge's cracked and horror-stricken voice.

“Lydia!”

Hurriedly they disengaged and stood apart—moist lips, hot cheeks, and burning eyes still giving evidence of their passion. Then Mrs. Harmon dropped her face into her hands and turned away, but Jim gazed with mounting shame into the eyes that met his—met while yet they showed Beth's detestation of him. And the Judge stood quiet, his hand pressed to his breast, his breath stopped, his head confused with the noises that roared in his ears.

At last Beth moved. Slowly she put her hands together; her eyes showed more of indignation, less of loathing. She drew her hands apart and held out to him the right—not with fingers upward, beckoning, but palm downward, fingers closed together. Then she opened them. The golden circlet fell, its diamond flashing; it bounded on the rug, and rolled; it stopped at Mrs. Harmon's feet. She, looking downward through her fingers, wondering at the silence, saw, and started away with a cry.

Then Beth turned her back on Jim, and went away. The old Judge followed, dazed, and the curtains fell behind them.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH JUDGE HARMON LEAVES THE STORY

THE Judge opened the street-door for Beth, and seemed to be preparing to follow her out. In spite of all she had gone through, perhaps because of it, her mind was alive to little things, and she saw that he was dazed. "You're not coming with me, sir? And without your coat?"

"I was going with you, was I not?" he asked. "But I—I've forgotten. Can you find your way alone?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "You must not come. Go in, sir." As if mechanically, he obeyed her, and shut the door. Beth went down the steps.

But the Judge seemed still confused. Slowly, very slowly he entered the hall. He went to the great chair that stood opposite the parlour door, and sat in it. His breath still came with difficulty, his head was buzzing; he could not remember what had happened. Then, raising his head, he looked through the portieres, which he and Beth had parted slightly, into the parlour. He saw, he remembered, and his heart gave a great leap in his breast.

So long as they heard voices at the door, Mrs. Harmon and Jim had stood listening. But when the indistinct tones ceased, and the door shut, they looked at each other.

"They've both gone!" Jim said. But they listened a moment longer. The slow footsteps of the Judge, as he made his way over the heavy rugs, were inaudible.

Jim held his hands out to her again, but she pointed to the ring upon the floor.

"Trouble for you!"

He picked up the ring. "Trouble for both of us," he responded gloomily.

"Worst for you," she replied. "What shall you do?"

"I don't know."

"Oh!" and she stamped her foot. "How stupid of us! It was all, at last, just as we wished it. It could have gone on, nobody knowing. Now—oh, I am furious!"

"You mean," he asked, "that you would have let it go on as we were?"

"Yes."

"Meeting only once in a while?"

"Of course!"

"And that would have satisfied you?"

"Satisfied? No, Jim. But that would be all we could have."

"Then I am glad we were seen!" he cried. "I couldn't have gone on that way. Now we shall have to act."

"Act? What do you mean?"

"This," answered Jim. "Everything has got to stop for me, anyway. I'm—I'm in trouble. Ellis——" and he stopped to curse.

"Don't, don't!" she begged him. "Explain; I don't understand."

"He led me into it," said Jim. "He suggested it all: how I could take the money they send to the mill every Saturday for the men's pay, how I could get my mother's power of attorney, and use her securities. I never should have thought of it but for him—never!"

"You mean," asked Mrs. Harmon, "that you have done those things?"

"Yes," he replied. "I wanted to please you, to give you things, and have money."

She turned partly away from him, and stood looking down. Jim came to her side. "But we don't care, do we, Lydia?" He put his hands on her shoulders.

She moved away quickly. "What do you mean?"

"Ellis won't help me. Mather is after me. I've got to go away—go away this very night. Lydia, come with me!"

"Mr. Wayne," she began slowly.

"No; call me Jim!"

"You poor Jim, then. I can't do this."

"Why?" he stammered. "I thought you loved me?"

"So I do. So I will, if you'll stay here and let things go on as they were."

"Haven't I shown you I can't?"

"It can be hushed up."

"No, no!" he cried in despair. "And I can't face people; everybody will know. Lydia, come with me!" He neared her again, stretching out his arms; as she sought to avoid him, he strode to her side and caught her. "Come, come! I can't give you up." He crushed her to him and began kissing her eagerly.

But she resisted with sudden energy. "Let me go! Shall I call the servants?" He released her in astonishment; angrily she moved away from him, smoothing her dress. "I believe you're a fool after all, as Mr. Ellis said."

"Lydia!"

"I am Mrs. Harmon," she returned. "If you won't make a fight for yourself, you're not the man I thought you. Go away, then, but not with me."

"Then you don't love me?"

"Boy!" she said, growing scornful. "Love? What is love but convenience?"

"Oh," he cried, "come! You must come with me. See, I have money. Seven, eight hundred, I think. That will last a long time. We can go somewhere; I can get work; no one will find us."

"And that," she asked, "is all you offer? Eight hundred dollars, and a life in hiding!"

He began to understand, this poor Jim, but it was too much to grasp all at once. "You're fooling me, aren't you? Don't; I can't bear it. Say you'll come with me!" Beseeching her with open arms, he went toward her so eagerly that to avoid him she slipped around the table and went to the door. Then as she looked back at him, awkwardly pursuing, she saw him as she had never seen him before. He had rumbled his hair again: none but a manly head looks well when mussed. His eyes were bloodshot, his mouth open; she turned away in disgust, and looked into the hallway to measure her retreat.

There she saw her husband sitting, upright in his chair. With a sudden movement she threw the curtains wide apart and revealed him to Jim. "See," she said. "I have a protector. Now will you leave me?"

A protector! Jim, at first startled, saw the open mouth, the glazing eyes. He pointed, gasping; she saw and was frightened. In three steps she was at her husband's side; she grasped his arm. He was dead! Then she recovered herself. The doctor had said this might happen.

"He is—is——" hesitated Jim. "Oh, come back here; shut it out!"

"I shall call the servants," she answered. "You had better go."

"Go? And you are free! Lydia," he cried in despair, "for the last time, come with me!"

Cold and steady, she returned the proper response.

"And you ask me that in his dead presence! Free, when his death claims my duty to him? Go with you, when I should stay and mourn him?"

Had she opened her breast and shown him a heart of stone, she could not better have revealed her nature. It was to Jim as if the earth had yawned before his feet, showing rottenness beneath its flowers. That eye of ice, that hard mouth, those blasphemous words! Jim did not know, he never could remember, how he got himself from the house.

He fled by night from the pursuit that never was to be. Taking the New York train, he lay in his berth, thinking, dozing, thinking again, while the train sped through the darkness. He slept and dreamed of burning kisses; he woke to feel the swaying of the car, to hear the whistle scream, or, shutting out all other sounds, to strain his ears for noises close at hand—the rustling of the curtains or the soft footfall of the porter. He slept again, and from a nightmare in which a serpent coiled about him, he came to himself in a quiet station, where steam hissed steadily, where hurrying steps resounded, where trucks rumbled by, and voices were heard giving orders. He looked from his berth along the curtained aisle—what misery besides his own was hiding behind those hangings? Then he dozed again with the motion of the train, and saw Beth, far removed and wonderfully pure, looking down on him with horror; his dream changed and Mrs. Harmon stood at his side, leading a walking corpse. And then he started from sleep with a smothered shriek, and with his thoughts urged the train to go faster, faster away from Beth, from that temptress, from the friends he had betrayed and the mother whom he had robbed.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JUDITH BINDS HERSELF

JUDITH was alone, waiting for Mather, and wrestling with the question which at the discovery of her father's body had rushed upon her. Was his death her fault?

Had she accepted Ellis, or had she recalled her refusal when her father begged her, the Colonel would now be living. She might have guessed the desperate resolve that he had taken. What would have been her duty, had she understood? Or what should she have done, had he appealed to her? And not understanding, not having foreseen, how much was her fault?

There was here a chance for speculation to drive a weaker woman wild. But Judith had not the nature to yield to such a danger. Essentially combative, naturally active, her habit was to put the past behind, accept the present, and look the future in the face. This instinct stood by her now, and even though her shuddering mind still dwelt upon the catastrophe, something within her called her to stand up, control herself, look forward. And one more mental trait, which was in some respects the great defect in her character—namely her almost masculine fashion of judging herself and others—here stood her in good stead, and served her by showing her father's action in the proper light.

Though she perceived that she had led him into this entanglement, she saw more. The Colonel had had not only his own but also his wife's fortune: where had the money gone? Strong as were Judith's grief and pity

for him, abundantly as she acknowledged her part in his error, she could not fail to see how selfish had been his actions, how cowardly this desertion!

But remembering her own great error, she could not blame. How deeply they had both been at fault! She began to sympathise with the Colonel's mistakes, to understand him better, to wish that in their relations they had not been so aloof. He must have been many times in doubt, pain, the deepest of trouble, and she had never suspected. Judith began to be stirred by more daughterly feelings than since childhood; her grief and pity grew stronger, unavailing regret seized her, and when George Mather arrived he found her in tears.

He had never imagined such a sight, nor had he met such sweet dignity as that with which, controlling herself, she rose and welcomed him. She told him of her father's death. Mather had not admired the Colonel; he was not surprised at such a weak end; and while she spoke all his senses dwelt on her—on the wonderful fresh charm, which, springing from the new humility, made more of a woman of her. Stoically but stupidly he paced the room, remembering that he was not there to consider himself, but to do what he could for her. There were things which must be done; as gently as he could he reminded her of them, and going to the telephone called up the doctor and asked him to bring the medical examiner. And while Mather did this, cursing himself that he could not console her, all the time a new sensation was occupying her—the comfort of having, for the first time in her life, a man to depend on.

Then Beth arrived, with Pease who had met her in the street—Beth, wild of eye, the very foundations of her nature shocked, in one evening twice betrayed. The poor little thing still maintained a false composure, checked from time to time the tears that would spring,

and fought with all her force against the thoughts which were ready to engulf her. She went straight to Judith and rested at her side, feeling that there was strength, and that with George in the house, and with Pease there, silent and steady, no more harm could come to her.

Judith sent the two men to her father's study, where they saw the evidence of his one resolute deed. They took the letter, the result of his only wise one. Again in the parlour, they opened and read the letter together; their brows clouded as they read, and at the end their eyes met in a look of inquiry.

"Read it aloud," demanded Judith.

"I think we had better," said Pease, and Mather assented. And so the girls learned the full extent of their calamity, for with unusual brevity the Colonel had written:

"I have nothing left, not a stock nor a bond. The furniture is mortgaged, so is the house; Ellis, through brokers I suppose, has bought me up completely and threatens to turn me out on Monday. He can do it; besides, I owe him fifteen thousand dollars. The girls don't own anything but their clothes and knick-knacks, and Judith's typewriter.

"I don't see any way out of this, and I'm tired of thinking. You two are young and clever; I turn the problem over to you.

"Take care of my girls."

And with these words the Colonel had handed his burden over to others. Tears sprang to Beth's eyes as she understood. It was natural that even so soon his selfishness should force itself to notice. Ah, if men could but guide themselves by the consideration of what will be thought of them after they are gone, how different would be their lives! Not the religion man professes, nor even

the love he actually bears, can teach him to overcome caprice or to sink himself in others. Yet since it may be that the punishment after death is to see ourselves as others see us, let us not belabour the poor Colonel with words, but leave him in that purgatory where the mirror of souls will teach self-understanding.

Judith was stunned. The real meaning of her father's statements came upon her like a blow, the room vanished from before her eyes, and she clutched the arm of the sofa where she sat, to keep from falling. The house mortgaged! The furniture pledged! And the great debt besides! The calamity overpowered her.

"Judith!" cried Mather in alarm.

She groped with her hands before her face and cleared the mist away. "It is nothing," she said. "I am—strong."

"I hope," said Pease, "that you will let Mr. Mather and me assume your father's trust."

"Tell me this," Judith requested, trying to command her voice. "We have no property at all—none at all. But there is that debt to Mr. Ellis. What is my liability to him?"

"Nothing whatever," Pease replied.

"I do not understand," she said. "I—I am responsible. If the debt were small, I should wish to earn the money to pay it. And though it is large, I think I ought to try to do the same."

"Impossible!" cried Pease. Judith listened while he protested and explained, but the matter became no clearer. Her own great fault had brought all this about: the debt was hers. She tried to make him comprehend.

"I——" she said, and faltered. "There are things you do not know."

"Judith," began Mather, "first let me understand, Mr. Ellis broke with your father?"

"And with me," she added simply.

"Then let me ask what object he had in lending money to your father?"

"Oh, don't you see," she cried, "that only makes it worse? If I—led him on, if on my account father supposed—— It all comes back to me. It's my fault, my fault!" She was almost wild.

"But you did not know," he pointed out. "This debt cannot bind you."

"It is all my fault," she repeated.

"What does your sister think?" asked Pease. "What would Mr. Wayne say?" He spoke with the hope of new influence; but Beth dissolved in sudden tears, and holding out her hand, showed her finger bare of its ring and red with the rubbing which all this time she had been giving it, to remove even the mark of Jim's pledge.

"Do not speak of him!" she sobbed.

Judith gathered her in her arms; the men walked into the next room. As Judith sought to comfort unhappy Beth she felt mounting in herself an unknown tenderness. In this crisis all selfishness was impossible, all worldliness was far from her thoughts. Her heart spoke naturally in murmurings, softened the hand which gave the sweet caress, yet lent the strength that held her sister to her breast. It was a blessed minute for them both, for Judith learned new kindness, and Beth found, in place of a reserved sister, one who seemed to have a mother's gentleness. And yet their communion was brief, for the outer door—earlier left unlatched for Beth's return—opened and then shut, steps were heard in the hall, and a voice said inquiringly, "Colonel Blanchard?" It was Ellis!

Judith rose quickly to her feet, dashing the tears from her eyes; Beth also rose, astonished and alarmed. Scarcely had they made an attempt to compose them-

selves before Ellis appeared in the doorway. He slowly entered.

"Excuse me," he said; "I did not ring because I was afraid you would not receive me. I came to beg your pardon."

"It is granted," Judith answered coldly.

"I did not know what I was doing," he went on. "I—I hope we can go back to where we were. No," as she made a gesture of denial, "hear me out. I didn't mean what I said about the debt and mortgages—you know I did not. Let the mortgages run. And two of your father's notes are overdue. Look, I have written another to supersede them all, giving time for payment. Let him sign this, and I destroy the others. Will you tell him this?" He held out the note.

Her eyes glowed as she took it. "Have you a pen?" He drew out a fountain pen and gave it to her.

"What are you doing?" asked Beth, alarmed.

"I will sign it," Judith answered.

"You?" Ellis cried.

"My father is dead," she replied. Quickly she went to the table and cleared a space at its corner.

"Judith!" protested Beth. But Judith's eyes were bright with excitement, and she did not hear. Beth turned and sped into the adjoining room. Astonished, yet holding himself quiet, Ellis listened to the scratching of the pen, and watched Judith's eager face as she signed the note. She gave it to him, with the pen.

"There!" she said, in the tone of one who has fulfilled a duty.

Then Mather entered, too late. Ellis had torn the Colonel's notes and handed them to Judith. "What have you done?" Mather cried.

She faced him proudly. "I have assumed my father's debt."

To Pease, who had followed him, Mather cast one look of impotence; then he strode to the promoter's side. "Mr. Ellis, give me the note!"

But Ellis put it in his pocket. "It is mine."

"I will pledge myself for it," offered Mather, "at what terms you please."

"It is not for sale," said Ellis doggedly.

"I will bring cash for it on Monday."

"Thank you," sneered Ellis, "but I mean to keep it."

"Mr. Ellis," Mather cried, "on what terms will you part with the note?"

"I will part with it," he replied, "only to Miss Blanchard herself, as you must admit is proper, and the terms I will arrange with her alone."

He looked his defiance into Mather's face. The tense and shaking figure of his rival towered above him, and Pease started forward to prevent a blow. But Mather controlled himself and pointed to the door. "Go!"

Ellis bowed to the sisters. "Good-night." No one made answer as he went away.

Beth, exhausted, was asleep at last; Judith sat by her side. The medical examiner had come and gone, her father lay in peace, and the house was quiet. Downstairs Mather was watching: he had offered to stay; Beth had begged that he might. Judith would not allow her thoughts to dwell on him, or on the comfort of his neighbourhood. She would not think of Ellis, nor of those obligations, the extent of which she did not understand. Of her father she did not dare to think except to promise to take his place toward Beth, and to pay his debt even if the struggle should bring her to face the world's worst. Yet no fear troubled her, for a new self, an awakening soul, was stirring within her, calling for contrition, self-examination, and for new

resolves. Musing and confessing her faults, Judith went to the window and looked up at the stars; through them she looked into the unalterable and true. She had been wrong; she understood the falseness of her standards. Then she saw more, and awe began to come over her as she perceived so much where once had appeared so little. Life held love: her sister was left to her. Life held duty, and work to be accomplished. That work called her.

Yet how different it was from what she had expected! She had desired to mix with affairs; now in truth she would become part of them, but only as a wheel in the great machine. She was not disappointed nor dismayed. Seen thus near at hand, life had rewards, giving vigour, not ennui; and giving reality, not that artificiality of the past. She did not regret, for she saw greater heights to the new life which she faced than to the one dead level of the old conception.

It was also new to Judith that without reasoning she felt all this, and knew, as never before. She would give herself to this wonderful life, would follow it to whatever end was waiting for her, confident that, having acted right, that end could not be evil. And so feeling, her heart moved within her, again to her eyes came the tears, and another of those barriers melted away which stood between Judith and her true womanhood.

CHAPTER XXIX

KNOWLEDGE OF NEW THINGS

WHILE the Colonel lay unburied his house was unchanged. His daughters talked over their plans, and settled it between them, to the dismay of their new guardians, that Judith was to become a stenographer, Beth a governess. On the third day the fashionable part of Stirling showed as much interest as was permitted in the two funerals which took place at the same hour. The services for the Colonel were private, no flowers were sent, and a single carriage brought the mourners to the grave. On their way they passed the church where the body of the Judge, as became his high position and his wife's love of display, was having almost a state funeral, and where a curious throng waited at the door to see the people who should fill the score of waiting carriages. And so the Judge went to his rest much honoured, and the journals wrote about him; but the poor Colonel travelled simply to the cemetery, and only his daughters, Pease, and Mather, stood beside his grave. George remained to watch the filling-in; the others returned home, now home no longer—Judith could not regard it so.

"To-morrow," she said suddenly to her two companions in the carriage, "I shall begin to look for a boarding-house."

Beth gave her a startled glance, but said nothing. Pease answered, "We must talk it over." Even in the hurry and distress of their recent relations, Judith had

learned to understand him so well that she knew that his reply meant opposition. Pease was something new to her; she liked his deliberation, and was beginning to appreciate his force. When, arriving at the house, she found Miss Cynthia there, Judith knew that some plan had been made between them.

Miss Cynthia proposed it at once: the sisters should come to live with her. "You shall have a room apiece," she said. "You shall do exactly as you please. And there is nothing else for you to do."

"I knew," said Judith, "that our friends would think we oughtn't board."

"It isn't that," replied Miss Cynthia. "I say you can't. Next Monday this house and furniture are to be given over to Mr. Ellis. My dear girl, you haven't a penny to your name!"

Perhaps the brusque reply was merciful, as it swept away all grounds for argument. "Take Beth," Judith answered, "but there is no reason why you should help me. Let me go out and earn my living."

"I mean to take Beth," was the determined answer. "And I claim the chance to know you better."

"Judith," cried Beth tearfully, "would you go away from me?"

And Pease put in his argument. "You are not able to earn money yet. You must stay somewhere while you study."

"So," asked Judith, "all this has been talked over between you?"

Pease answered by giving her a note from Mather. "I hope," it read, "that for Beth's sake you will accept Miss Pease's offer." For Beth's sake! Judith looked at Beth, then at the other two, both prepared for battle, and yielded.

"I think," was Miss Pease's sole remark, "that you

are wise." Her manner implied a threat withdrawn, much as if, had not Judith agreed, she would have been carried off by force.

In three days more the house was vacated, and was surrendered to Ellis. When Pease and Mather had adjusted the Colonel's accounts, some few dollars were remaining to his estate, only to be swallowed up by the outstanding bills, the most significant of which was the account for the Japanese knife. And so the two girls, whose small savings had gone to buy their mourning, were left almost literally without a cent.

Thus Judith began the world anew on the charity of friends, telling herself that she must submit for the sake of accomplishing. She took her place at the side of Pease's table with the air of still presiding at her own, and Mather, coming in the evening, noted her bearing and groaned in spirit. He explained that he had come to see if the moving were successful. "Three trunks between us," said Judith. "Did you think the undertaking was very great?"

"There is your typewriter," he reminded her.

But she would have no jesting. "My one really valuable asset. And now you must tell me, George, where I should go to school. To what business college, I mean?"

For in spite of all protests, the sisters were preparing to work. From their old school-books they had saved those which might still be of service, and on the morrow Beth was to begin with her geography and arithmetic.

"It will be very unpleasant," Mather said, "going to a commercial school. Look here, there is a little girl in my office—you saw her at Chebasset—who can come and teach you, evenings."

"And my days?" she returned. "I am not afraid of the unpleasantness."

So he sighed and advised her. She appreciated that he had inquired into the standing of the schools, and could tell which was the best. The tuition was expensive, but there was a scheme by which scholars might pay out of future wages.

"And so I go deeper into debt before I can begin to earn for my fifteen thousand dollars?"

"Judith," he said, "let your friends make up that sum and relieve you of all relations with Ellis."

"Mr. Pease and you?" she asked.

"And Mr. Fenno. Excuse me for telling him; he had learned something of it from Beth."

"He is very kind," said Judith. "So are you all, but the debt would remain."

"Ellis can annoy you," he reminded her.

"Then let me bear it as a punishment. It may help me to make something of myself."

"How many years," he demanded, "do you mean to keep this up?"

"Forever, if necessary," she returned, but then spoke softly. "George, don't be vexed with me. What else can I do?"

She was earnest; he saw there no other way for her. "Let me help, then," he said, and told her more about the school. In her questions and comments he saw her interest in the future, her curiosity as to the life she was about to lead. In spite of all that had passed, in spite of the new deceptive softness, the old idea still held and ruled her: she would be in touch with things, would know what was going on in the world.

In her new home, little lessons began to come to Judith. Pease was a revelation of kindliness and ability—a contradiction. That such simplicity could cover such power, that he could set up an inflexible opinion against hers and yet be embarrassed in her

presence, was strange, yet very pleasing. Miss Cynthia with her violent manners was another source of knowledge, for this odd person was a woman of the world; she had experience and importance; she corresponded with philanthropists, and people of note came to see her. And Judith gained from her this lesson: that from a quiet home one may extend a wide influence, and be of the world while not at all times in it. Thus the two Peases, with their individuality, did much to show Judith that there was force still remaining in the old families which she had rated so low. She grew to have a little fear of Miss Pease, with her searching questions and blunt comments, lest she should inquire into Judith's interest in Ellis, and with that cutting tongue lay bare her folly. And yet at the same time Judith took comfort in Miss Cynthia, who upheld her in her plans. Miss Cynthia had worked for her living, and declared that it did a woman good.

But the strongest new influence on Judith was in her relations with Beth. Judith had always recognised Beth's strength. A feminine fortitude, not disdaining tears; a perception of worldly values which Judith was coming to see was clearer than her own; steadfastness and charity: these were the qualities which had brought Beth through the recent crisis with less actual change than in her sister. And Judith, beginning to admire in Beth the traits which previously she had merely noted, found also a great comfort in her sister's girlishness, a solace in her softer nature which was to Judith the beginning of the possibilities of friendship.

For, save with Ellis, Judith had never spoken freely, and with him but little. At the same time she had never been lonely, turning from friends. Yet in this changed life she took pleasure in Beth's nearness, interested herself in her doings, and invited her con-

fidences. She grew jealous lest Miss Cynthia, so long Beth's friend, should take the place which belonged to her; and so by gentleness Judith won from Beth the story which weighed on her mind.

It was one evening when the sisters had gone up-stairs; Judith went into Beth's room. Beth, with her sadness so well controlled, seemed sweeter than she had ever been. She had grown pale over her books. "If you go to your school," she said when Judith remonstrated with her, "why shouldn't I work, too?" But she was often weary at the end of the day, and seemed so now.

"Beth," said Judith, "I saw Mrs. Wayne to-day. She was looking better. George has found a buyer for her house, and she is going to live with some cousins."

"I am very glad that is settled so well," answered Beth, and then asked with hesitation: "Has anything been heard from—Jim?"

"Nothing," replied Judith. "Beth, are you worrying about him?"

"No," Beth said. "I—I am sorry for him, but——" She looked up. "Oh, Judith, I want to speak to some one about it. There is a part of it that no one knows. May I tell you?"

Judith knelt at her side. "Tell me, dear?" she begged.

Beth, clasping Judith's hand and feeling the comfort of her sympathy, told the story of that meeting at the Judge's—told the whole of it. Had she done right in giving back the ring?

Judith assured her that she had.

"That is not all," said Beth. "I thought that I gave it back because he had been—untrue, yet that I loved him just the same. But, Judith, I have been thinking—you have seen me thinking?"

"Yes, dear," Judith answered. "What have you thought?"

Beth pressed her hands. "You must tell me if I am right. For I seem almost hard-hearted, sometimes. Judith, why did the Judge die?"

Judith looked at her with startled eyes. "It killed him!"

Beth nodded solemnly. "*It* killed him, or did—they!"

"They!" Judith cried.

"But she most," went on Beth, looking straight in front of her. "Sometimes I think I understand it, Judith. It wasn't sudden; it must have been going on for some time. I went to see Mrs. Wayne that once, you remember, after it all happened. She doesn't blame Jim; she took me up into his room: it was just as it was that night, with his bed opened for him. And she cried there. But I looked on the bureau, Judith, and saw pictures of—her."

"Of Mrs. Harmon?"

"Yes. And one almost covered the one he had of me. Judith, he hadn't come to this all of a sudden? Tell me, for I don't want to misjudge him."

"I have seen him with her," answered Judith. "Once I saw them at the theater door, going out together." The coincidence made itself clearer. "That was the day you and he went; I supposed you were behind."

"We—he—it was my fault," said Beth. "I went away from the play, and he left me, angry. He must have met her and gone with her. And at other times, when I knew he was not at Chebasset, and expected him to come to me, and he didn't—do you suppose he was with her?"

"I'm afraid so."

"And that kiss," said Beth, shuddering. "It was so

eager—fierce! It wasn't just flirting. He—he preferred her to me."

"Beth, dear!" murmured Judith, soothing her.

"He was—weak," went on Beth. "I suppose I always knew it, but I wouldn't admit it. So weak that she—I want to be charitable, but I think she led him away from me."

"I am afraid she did, dear."

"I forgive him," said Beth, struggling to pursue her thought to the end. "Of course you know that, Judith. But I was fond of the Judge, and he died from—it. And Jim was—false to me, and" (Judith felt the little form begin to quiver) "even his dishonesty was not for me but for—her, because Mr. Price sent Mrs. Wayne a great bill for expensive jewels, and she asked me if—if I'd give them back, and I had to say that he—hadn't given me any!"

"Beth, dear!" cried Judith, clasping the quivering form. "Beth, be brave!"

"I will," said Beth, struggling heroically. "But as I've thought it out by myself——"

"Oh, you've been all alone!" cried Judith, reproaching herself. "Why didn't I understand?"

"I had to think it out," Beth said. "I think I see it clearly now, Judith, and I know myself better, and I'm—ashamed of myself that I'm so selfish, but I think that I—don't love him—any more!"

Tears came to her relief, and she clung to her sister, shaken with sobs. Judith wept with her; for them both that was a blessed hour. Long after others were abed their murmured conference lasted, for Beth needed to be told, over and over again, that she had done right, and felt right, and Judith was glad of it.

Thus new feelings grew in Judith, stronger for her contact with the outside world. For the school was

disagreeable and humiliating. She had to go back to the rudiments of knowledge; she had to do examples and find them wrong. Her teachers were unpleasant, her fellow-pupils coarse and inquisitive. The many little daily rubs commenced to tell on her; her cheeks lost colour, her step something of its vigour, and she began to look upon the outer world as something with power to do her still more harm.

Yet to it she presented a haughty front, as one person found. Mrs. Harmon came to call, an interesting widow, dressed in her new mourning. It was late in the afternoon; the day had gone hard with Judith, she had forgotten to eat luncheon, and since her return from the school had been sitting over her "home lessons," wretched tasks which called her to make up the accounts of a certain Mr. Y——, and also to calculate the interest on notes at four, five, and seven and a half per cent. for periods of from twelve to a hundred days. Her answers would not agree with those in the book. But faint and discouraged as she was, her eyes grew bright as she saw Mrs. Harmon's card, and she walked into the parlour with the air of a grenadier.

"Why, Judith, child," said Mrs. Harmon, rising, "how changed you look! I am so glad I came to comfort you."

"And I am glad you came," Judith returned. "I have been wishing to see you."

"You have been lonesome, dear?"

"To thank you," pursued Judith steadily, "for the service you did my sister, in ridding her of Mr. Wayne."

Very fortunately, after the two had remained looking at each other for a quarter of a minute, while Mrs. Harmon grew very red in the face and Judith remained unchanged, Miss Cynthia suddenly entered the room.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, halting. "I didn't know that any one was here."

"You didn't disturb us," Judith answered. "Mrs. Harmon was just going."

Mrs. Harmon, looking as if she would burst if she attempted to speak, could only bow with an attempt at frigidity, quite spoiled by the visible heat which was almost smothering her, and departed with suddenness. Miss Cynthia, never surprised at people's actions, looked at Judith, whose cheeks were very pale, while her eyes had lost their fire.

"I suppose I've insulted her," said Judith.

"I hope you have," Miss Cynthia answered. But watching Judith intently, she suddenly seized her by the arm, forced her to the sofa, forbade her to stir, and sent for tea. It was a sign of change that Judith took the ministration passively.

Yet her growing weariness was not to be relieved by a short rest or a cup of tea. Her nerves kept her at work, driving her at forced draught, which for long at a time is good for neither machinery nor man. Mather came that evening, and was led into the parlour by Beth, but his eyes sought for Judith in vain. "Where is she?" he demanded.

"She's in the dining-room," Beth said. "This evening it's her shorthand; she's expanding her notes."

"And she wouldn't want to see me?"

"She *needs* company."

He looked at her, trying to read her meaning; she smiled and tossed her head. "Beth is beginning to look better," he thought, and remembered that she had never asked him for news of Jim. Then her expression changed as a step was heard in the hall; it was Pease coming, plantigrade and slow. "Is that it?" thought Mather.

"I think I'll go and see Judith," he said, and passed Pease at the door.

Judith was in the dining-room, bending over her note-book. Scattered sheets lay on the table before her; her hair had in places escaped from its confinement and strayed over forehead and nape. He saw the fatigue in her eyes as she raised them.

"I'm all mixed up," she said.

He drew up a chair and sat down. "So I should think. How any one reads shorthand I don't see." He took the note-book. "It seems well done."

"Sometimes I write it correctly," she said, "and then can't read it. Sometimes I could read it if I had only written it right. To-day the man read very fast, on purpose, and I lost some of it."

"I think," he said, "that if you could at times forget your work, you would come back to it fresher."

"I can't forget it," she replied. "Sometimes I dream of it."

"We'll have you sick on our hands," he warned her.

"Don't lecture, George," she answered. "Give me the book."

He watched her for a while as she translated her hieroglyphs; she kept at it doggedly. "Good-night," he said at last. She looked up to respond, smiled mechanically, and turned to her work before he was out of the room. He went to the parlour and stood anxiously before Beth and Pease.

"You'll have her breaking down," he said.

"There is nothing we can do," Beth answered. "She will keep at it."

"I've warned you," he responded, and took his hat. He was at the front door, when from the dining-room Judith called him to her. "George," she asked, "is six per cent. the legal rate of interest?"

"In this State it is," he answered.

"Then my note to Mr. Ellis is rolling up interest at nine hundred a year?"

"I suppose so."

"Can I ever earn as much?"

"With experience you can."

"And I must earn much more in order to pay anything on the principal?"

"Yes."

She put her hands together in her lap. "I am learning something." As he stood and looked at her, he saw two tears roll out upon her cheeks.

"Judith!" he cried, striding toward her.

But she rose quickly, putting out a hand to keep him away. "I am only tired," she said. "I'm sorry not to be better company. Good-night, George."

He stopped instantly, said "Good-night," and went away. Then suddenly she felt forlorn, and more tears came into her eyes. "He would not have gone if he loved me still."

CHAPTER XXX

TIME BEGINS HIS REVENGES

POLITICAL and social undercurrents were slowly working to the surface in the world of Stirling. Though it was barely spring, the mayoralty campaign was well under way, promising a close struggle in the fall. A more immediate matter was the threatened strike, which the men's leaders were urging in the hope that the approaching annual meeting of the stockholders of the street-railway might bring some relief. In these affairs the attitude of Ellis was of importance.

The newspapers called him the Sphinx, since he gave no sign of his purposes. In politics, of course, it was to be assumed that he was on the side of the machine. But against the strike he might take a variety of courses, with a variety of results, all of which were, by the speculative, mapped and calculated in advance. He might yield and avoid the strike, he might defy it, or at the last minute he might by some sudden action entirely change the aspect of affairs and bring himself profit and credit. Just how this last could be done no one seemed to be sure, but since from day to day matters were growing worse and Ellis made no move, it was confidently stated that he had "something up his sleeve."

Otherwise there was no explaining his conduct. His opponents did not dare to believe that he was blinded by self-confidence, and yet his own followers, trust him as they might, were uneasy. His manner showed a steady,

almost savage determination to win, and yet he did not "tend to business." There were days when he was absent from his office altogether, refusing to talk with his subordinates except by telephone—and they hated to discuss plans except within four walls. There was even one day when he disappeared altogether, just when the Stirling representatives had come down from the State capital to confer with him on the street-railway bill, the prospects of which, on account of the clause conferring eminent domain, were none too bright. Ellis, when at last his men found him in the evening, said only that he had been at Chebasset. Moreover, his men got little out of him: with an odd new gleam in his eye, he merely listened as they spoke; he gave no directions, and when they begged him to run up to the capital and lobby for himself he thanked them and said he'd think it over. Feeling their journey to have been for nothing, they left him, grumbling among themselves. Something seemed wrong with him.

Something was wrong with him. A man with a pain gnawing at his heart and a ghost always before his eyes cannot attend to his work. It was not the Colonel's ghost that dogged Ellis: he never troubled for his part in Blanchard's death. Judith, splendid in cold anger, haunted him. She spoiled his sleep, she came between him and his work, she tormented him by the vision of what he had lost. There was a steady drain upon him, as from an unhealed wound—or from that inward bleeding which, on the very first day of their acquaintance, he had felt on leaving her. No, he was not himself; his mind was confused, his energies wasted, by the constant alternation of anger and despair.

When realisation swept upon him suddenly, then he shut himself up, refused himself to all, and fought his fury until he had controlled it. That day when he went

to Chebasset he had not intended to go, but on his way to his office there suddenly rushed over him the sense of his loss. Possessed by the thought, he took the train to Chebasset and wandered half the day among his grounds, tormenting himself by the recollection that these drives, walks, shrubberies were laid out for Judith, and now she would never live among them. When he took out of his pocket a slip of paper bearing her signature and told himself that she was in his power—in his power!—he found no pleasure in the thought.

In the evening he had not cast off his mood, and when he met his men, sent them away dissatisfied. One, bolder or more foolhardy than the others, lingered a moment. "Say," he asked, "what's wrong?"

"Nothing," answered Ellis.

"Honest I'm telling you," said his henchman, "a strike will kill the bill. And the men on the road are getting ugly."

"Thanks," Ellis replied impatiently. The glow in his eyes suddenly became fierce, and the man took himself off.

All this was extremely irritating to Ellis; he felt more angry with his own men than with his opponents, and was ready to punish them for insubordination without considering the cause of their alarm. It was unfortunate for Mr. Price that he chose to come to Ellis just after his legislators had left him. Price wore the same uneasy air.

"Now, what are you worried about?" Ellis began on him.

It was his street-railway stock, Price explained. The quotations were so continually dropping——

"Only fifteen dollars!" Ellis interrupted scornfully.

"Yes," agreed Price, "but they will soon be down again to where I bought them."

"Bought?" sneered Ellis. "*Bought!*"

"Well——" hesitated Price.

"What is it to you," demanded Ellis in jarring tones, "where the price of the stock is, up or down? It cost you nothing, it pays you well, it's a sure thing. Just you hold it and send me your proxies."

"But," suggested Price, very much brow-beaten, yet endeavouring to say what he came for, "if it's such a good thing, won't you, perhaps, take it?"

"What!" rasped Ellis. "My God, Price, haven't you the decency to sit still and say nothing?"

"Oh, well," mumbled the jeweller, writhing, "if the stock is so sure—you're sure it's solid?"

"Certainly," Ellis said. "Price, don't be an ass! The other side is just selling itself a share or two, every little while, to make the impression that the value is falling. Don't you be taken in."

"Oh, if that's all!" breathed Price, much relieved. He took his hat.

"There, run along," said Ellis. "You know who are your best friends." He spoke as if directing a child, and Price went away with an irritated sense of his own impotence and meanness.

But Ellis found no relief in scolding his dependents. He missed something; he knew that he needed a place where he might sit quiet and forget the grind and grime of his affairs. The best that was left to him was Mrs. Harmon, but she never could equal Judith, and when he went to see her now she bothered him with her advice.

"I wanted to see you," were her first words. "I have been thinking of telephoning you."

"What is it now?" he asked drearily.

"Stephen," she demanded with energy, "do you realise what is going on? They are all organising against you."

"What can they do?" he snarled.

"Your own men are frightened," she said. "Two of them came to me to-day—no, I won't tell their names. They begged me to tell you there mustn't be a strike. You'll lose your bill, your mayor will be defeated. Can't you see that?"

"No!" he returned.

"The papers are all calling for Mather as street-railway president," she went on. "The men say they would never strike under him. It's all very well for you to say that the travelling public must take what you give them, but people won't——"

"Lydia," he interrupted, "it's very good of you to be interested in my position, but suppose you give your time to your own. It needs it bad enough."

He touched a sore, for Judge Harmon's old friends, remembering his disappointment in his wife, were dropping her. She was irritated, and snapped in return. "You look very badly," she said critically. "Just for a girl, Stephen?"

He glared at her so furiously, at a loss for speech, that she was frightened and begged his pardon. Yet after she had given him tea she returned again to the charge.

"You said, Stephen, that you control a majority of shareholders' votes. You aren't afraid that some of your men will sell out to the other side? I see the stock is down."

"But is it traded in?" he asked. "Only a share or two. You are like Price; he came whimpering to me yesterday about his fifty shares."

"But the balance is pretty even, isn't it?" she inquired. "Mightn't fifty shares just make the whole difference?"

"If you mean whether Price would sell me out," he

answered. "He never bought his shares. They came to him through me. He's tied to me."

"I don't see how?" she said doubtfully. "He's not in politics now; he's independent, and he gets his money from the upper people—the other side entirely. But I suppose you know. Still, I wish Abiel had never sold his stock."

"Don't worry," he commanded. "Confound it, I have to supply courage to the whole of you."

His men had need of his courage as day by day matters drifted nearer to a crisis and they saw their enemies organising. Those nervous and eager persons, the reform politicians, had long talks with the men of money, who were not now averse to giving them interviews. The men of money talked together, and the newspapers claimed that at last, after almost a generation, the society leaders were to take a hand in politics. As several of the reformers held railway stock, and as the fashionables could (if they chose) muster many votes for the election, their alliance against Ellis might prove formidable. The reformers grew more cheerful, old Mr. Fenno more grim, Pease more thoughtful as the days went by. The time was near for the annual meeting of the street-railway shareholders, and the strike, if it came at all, would come before that. The whole city was intent upon the event.

And Judith, tired as she was, roused to watch the struggle. Was her sluggish class waking at last? Was Ellis at bay? Was Mather to come forward and lead? Judith read the newspapers, but gleaned only such statements as: "Mr. Fenno and Mr. Branderson at last control a majority of street-railroad votes," or "Mr. Watson has added largely to his holdings of street-railway stock." She knew these reports could not be true: the stock was tied fast long ago, and Ellis would

take every pains to maintain his supremacy. But Mather would explain to her the condition of affairs.

Yet he came seldom to the house. She knew that his mind was occupied, he was interviewed and pestered on all hands. Day by day she read in the papers: "Mr. Mather refuses to make any statement." But he might speak to her. His only desire, when he came to call, appeared to be to throw off every care save for her health. She did not like to broach the important topic, yet with repression her interest grew, and she felt deeply disappointed when, the opportunity being given to speak upon it, he was reserved.

He met her in a street-car, and sat by her side. When the conductor came for his fare Mather nodded to him and called him by name. "Good-day, Wilson."

"I've taken Mr. Ellis's fare every day for two years," said the man, "yet I don't think he knows me by sight. Ah, Mr. Mather, if we only had you back there wouldn't be no strike."

Mather smiled. "We were all good friends in those days."

The man went away, and Judith asked as much as she dared. "How does it seem to be so in demand?"

"I'm not so sure how much in demand I am," he replied, and then spoke of other things.

She thought that he was avoiding the subject, and told herself that he did not need her any more. Far away were those days when he sought her advice—and this thought made her sigh occasionally over her work. The tasks grew harder as she felt herself left out; she became eager to do more than merely study, feeling that, with so much going on around her, she was nothing.

One night when Mather came he spoke for a while with Pease privately, then hurried away without waiting to see the others. Judith had put her books

away; now she took them again, and went into the dining-room to work. But she could not fix her mind on her figures, and after a while she said aloud in the room: "A month ago when he came to see me I would not stop work to speak with him. Now when he comes I put away my books, but he does not wait."

Then she heard Pease speaking with Beth in the parlour, and heard George's name coupled with Ellis's. So Beth was learning all about the plans! Smothering a sudden jealousy, Judith determined to go and ask what had been said, yet at the door her resolution failed her, and she turned back. Let others know, she would go without—and she applied herself to her figures until her head swam with them. She went unhappily to bed and lay there thinking.

Through her loneliness was rising a dread of Ellis as an overhanging menace; she began to fear that he would defeat Mather a second time. Ellis's sinister force began to oppress her, not only as a cause of general evil, but also as threatening disaster to that friend whose value, even whose excellence, her anxieties were teaching her to acknowledge. As Judith's thoughts dwelt on the man in whom, without brilliance or the stamp of genius, there was nothing false, nothing base or mean, and nothing hidden, Ellis seemed like an enemy who, once successful against herself, was slowly approaching for an attack on Mather—an enemy whose skill she knew, whose resources she feared, and whose mercy she doubted. Dreading thus for Mather, she began to tremble also for herself: she was in Ellis's debt so deep that only a miracle could ever clear her, while every day was rolling up the interest against her. Where would this end?

And through her dread increased her loneliness. Looking for help, she found that she must depend

solely upon herself. Day by day she had learned how small were her powers beside the immense energies of the city. The definite fear of Ellis suggested still other calamities, vague, hid in the impenetrable future; there was no misfortune which fate could not bring upon her, no defense which she could interpose. She was alone—and suddenly she began to long for companionship, the fellowship which some one could give, which some one once offered, which then she had refused, but which now seemed more precious than anything in the world.

Thus Judith, in her trouble, was unmindful of the power which still was hers, and ignorant of the revenge which she was to take for all of her misfortunes. For though she felt herself so weak, it was she, and she alone, who brought on Ellis the strike which his supporters were so anxious to prevent.

On a morning, the consequences of whose events were to reach far, going as usual to her school she passed Ellis in the street. Faltering and shocked, he stood still while she passed. He had not seen her since the night of her rejection of him, and the change in her was startling. She was in black, had grown thin and pale, and her spirited carriage had changed to the walk of weariness, yet her beauty of face shone out the clearer, and still she was a picture which men turned to watch. She did not notice Ellis, but passed with face set, eyes looking far away, absorbed in thought. When she had gone from his sight Ellis hurried to his offices and locked himself in the inner room. There for an hour he walked up and down, up and down.

His clerk heard him, and dared not interrupt him for small matters; the routine business of the morning was easily discharged. But about noon came a deputation from the street-railway employees, asking to see Mr. Ellis.

The secretary listened at the door; Ellis was still pacing the room, yet the matter was important. The secretary knocked.

"Men from the union to see you," he said through the door.

"Tell them to come again," answered Ellis.

The secretary went with this answer to the deputation. The spokesman answered: "We have wasted enough time. We must see him now or not at all."

The secretary knocked again at Ellis's door. "They say they must see you now, sir," he said.

"Send them to the devil," Ellis replied. The secretary, without thought of the irony of his interpretation of the order, asked the men to wait. They consulted among themselves and went away.

That morning the cars on the streets had run as usual, but the delegates of the union, returning angrily from Ellis's office, gave the order for the men to strike. As each car returned to the barn its crew left; by one o'clock almost all the cars were housed. Then the supporters of Ellis began to gather in his outer office. Price was there, Daggett was there, a dozen others as well; they consulted anxiously. Not one of them had expected that Ellis would let the trouble go so far.

At last, with pale face and fierce eye, he appeared among them. "Ha," he said sardonically when he saw so many of them. "What has frightened you all?"

They told him of the strike; there was still one day, they reminded him, before the transfer books of the road should close. Some of his men thought he was staggered at the news, and the hastier, Price loudest among them, begged him to conciliate the men.

But the old fighting fire kindled within him, and he stopped them with scorn. "Don't be fools," he said.

"Price, you're a coward. The men will hit first, will they? Well, we'll give them all they want!"

He began to give directions how to meet the strike, and his energy was communicated to them all, save one. Even that one applauded with the rest, and outwardly approved.

CHAPTER XXXI

BRINGS ABOUT TWO NEW COMBINATIONS

FOR some time Beth Blanchard had been changing back to her old self. Once unburdened by confession, her heart seemed free again, and Beth began to think of Jim Wayne as a part of a past which could in no way affect her future. Sorry for him as she was, with her pity she mingled shame at those remembered kisses. She found pleasure in the society of Pease, partly because he stood for so much that Jim was not. Solid, sober, incapable of concealment, his qualities gave her satisfaction, and the more because she knew his thoughts to be so much of her. She took to teasing him again, a process to which he submitted with bewildered delight, and to which Miss Cynthia made Judith a party by getting her out of the room whenever Beth and Pease were in it. Under such favouring circumstances, which would have tried the stoicism of any one, Pease was proving himself quite human, and was harbouring new hopes. He could not fail to suspect that Beth mourned her father more than Jim, and what he imagined Miss Pease made sure.

"You've never told me, Peveril," she asked him, "if you lost much by Mr. Wayne?"

"Two weeks' wages of our men," he answered.

"Worth what you get for it?" she asked.

"What do I get?" he inquired.

"Her!" she answered emphatically.

"If you suppose," he said, with an appearance of

confidence which was utterly false, "that Miss Blanchard will forget Mr. Wayne, you are quite mistaken."

"You are right," said Miss Cynthia, "she never will forget him." Her cousin's heart sank. "She thinks of him every day" (Miss Cynthia was watching him, and made a purposeful pause) "as something that she has escaped from. And *now* the way is open for a man that is a man!" Then she smiled as she noted his relief.

The way was indeed open, and the two were progressing along it very fast, when suddenly a position was offered to Beth. Old Mrs. Grimstone had, for the twelfth time, lost her attendant, and some one recommended the younger Miss Blanchard. It was a handsome offer that the old lady made; money was nothing to her, and she had learned that she must pay high for such service as she demanded. For she was, notoriously, the most exacting, crabbed, fractious old woman that ever wore false teeth, and any one who attended her lived a dog's life. Pease was utterly dismayed, and came to Judith to beg her to prevent this calamity.

"But what can I do?" she asked. "Mrs. Grimstone offers a hundred dollars a month—much more than any one else ever pays. How can Beth refuse?"

"Think," Pease adjured her, "of what she will have to bear!"

"I think her disposition is equal to it," Judith said.

"Oh, I don't doubt that," he hurriedly explained. "But Mrs. Grimstone is so rough!"

"Beth seems to think she must go," was all Judith could reply. "She usually knows her own mind, Mr. Pease."

"She does," he admitted mournfully. But he was not subdued, and blazed out with a fitful courage: "I will do my best to prevent it!"

"Do!" said Judith heartily.

Pease did his best; knowing how weak he was against Beth, he spent no time in discussion, but rushing into the subject he declared to Beth that she ought not go to Mrs. Grimstone, and that was all there was to it. Then he stood breathless at his own audacity.

"Ought not?" asked Beth, surprised at such precipitation in one who was usually so slow. "If few persons are willing to go to Mrs. Grimstone, isn't that a very good reason why I should?"

"It isn't that; it isn't that!" he replied, and wished, despairing, that he could voice his thoughts. But Beth's brown eyes, just a little quizzical, took away his courage, and all his impetus was spent. He gasped with vexation.

"Then what is it?" she asked, smiling outright.

"Promise me three days?" was all he could say. "I'm busy now—this street-railway—— Oh, don't laugh!" he begged as Beth's smile grew merrier. "Please promise me three days!"

To his delight she promised, and he went and began to draught a letter of such importance that its composition was to take nearly all of the seventy-two hours which she had accorded him. He hoped that what he had to say would not be too sudden—but he need not have worried. A man cannot note a girl's every movement, be solicitous at each little cold, know to a minute the calendar of her engagements, and gradually perfect himself in knowledge of her tastes, without declaring himself, unconsciously, in every sentence.

Upon this pleasant by-play Judith smiled, yet knew that her future would change with Beth's. For if Beth went to Mrs. Grimstone, Judith must find work; she could no longer bear the consciousness that she was not earning. A little envy stirred in her, as she feared that she could not possibly, in spite of all her preparation,

earn so much as Beth. In this belief the principal of her school confirmed her when she asked him if he could not find her a position.

"You understand that with your experience your salary will be small?" he asked her.

"Have I not done well since I came?" she inquired.

"I never had a better pupil," he replied. "But a few more months, Miss Blanchard——"

"How much could I earn to begin with?" she persisted.

"Forty dollars a month," he answered.

"So little?" she asked, disappointed.

"Perhaps fifty, if you have luck," he conceded. "But you'd better wait."

"I can't," Judith answered. "Will you tell me of any chance that you hear of?"

He promised that he would, yet gave her no immediate hope of a position. Judith was depressed; more and more it seemed to her that she was nothing, and her debt loomed large before her eyes. It seemed a great weight to carry—alone.

Nevertheless, she maintained her interest in the great combination against Ellis, could not fail to maintain it, for soon came the strike. It was an orderly strike and a good-natured public; people were saying cheerfully that the cars would be running again in a week, when Mr. Mather was president; but believing that no one could be sure of that, and ignorant of her own deep influence, Judith wished for the fiftieth time that she could learn how matters stood. The vagueness and uncertainty were wearing her.

And at last came the information. At the supper table, on the evening of the strike, Pease seemed as untroubled as usual, and as genial. Miss Cynthia broke in upon his calm.

"Peveril," she demanded, "what do the men hope to gain by striking now?"

"To-morrow," he explained, "the transfer books close. Only to-morrow's holders of stock can vote at the meeting a week hence."

"Oh," she said, "I see. The men hope to scare some of Ellis's supporters into selling out."

He nodded. "The men have very clever leaders."

"And will this help you?"

"I hope so."

She followed up the indirect admission. "Then you need help?"

"Get me forty shares," he said, "and the matter is settled. But——" he realised that he was talking shop. "The butter, please, Cynthia?"

"Well," she said in triumph, as she passed the dish, "I have at last learned something from you."

"Good!" he returned, undisturbed. "And I'll tell you this much more, that I haven't the slightest idea where I can find those forty shares."

"Oh!" she cried, dismayed. "What does Mr. Mather think?"

"Mather knows nothing about it," said Pease. "His friends are working for him without his knowledge, because they have never been sure that they could help him."

Judith, listening to the talk, told herself that Mather would never be president of the road; she had heard Ellis describe the little ring of men who stood solidly around him—men whom he had made. That ring would never be broken. Yet amid her disappointment she felt relief. Mather had never told her of the projects of his friends because, like herself, he had not been sure of them.

Before the meal was ended Mr. Fenno came—only for

a minute, he said, and bade them not to rise. Judith admired the picture that he made as he stood and talked with Pease; his white hair and mustache seemed whiter still by contrast with his coal-black eyebrows, while the dead black-and-white evening clothes were relieved by the soft sable which lined his overcoat. He questioned Pease with his accustomed bluntness.

"No go?"

"Nothing yet," Pease answered.

"Ah, he's clever!" said Mr. Fenno, to which encomium of Ellis Pease assented by a nod, but seemed not inclined to pursue the subject further. Then the servant, entering, announced that Mr. Price was at the door, asking for Mr. Pease. As Pease started from his seat his inquiring glance met Fenno's. The old man knit his heavy brows.

"Do you suppose——" he said.

"May be!" Pease answered with visible excitement.

"He must see you alone," added the maid.

"Show him into the parlour," Pease directed. For a minute he was alone with the jeweller; Fenno, forgetting the presence of the ladies, stared after him and waited. Then Pease returned.

"Can we have you with us, Mr. Fenno?" he asked.

The three shut themselves up in the parlour. Judith, as she controlled her deep interest, felt how often it was now her part to wait. But at last the parlour door opened again, and voices were heard. It was Price who spoke first.

"You understand, Mr. Pease—my family——"

"Yes, yes," Pease answered.

"And my position, you see," the explanation continued. Judith saw the jeweller, bowing and rubbing his hands together nervously.

"Yes," repeated Pease shortly, opening the outer

door for him. "At my office, Mr. Price, the first thing in the morning."

The door shut on the jeweller, and the two others came into the dining-room. Pease looked glum, the older man scornful, and in absorption they spoke before the others.

"It is settled, then," Mr. Fenno said grimly.

"I feel," responded Pease, "as if I had touched pitch."

"You will get over it," was the cynical retort. "Now, then, to finish all this up. Can you answer for Mather?"

Pease shook his head. "He must answer for himself."

"He shall, to-morrow," said Mr. Fenno. "What do you say to a meeting at my office—all of us?"

"You will need all," Pease answered.

"We can settle everything," went on Fenno in his heavy voice. "We will have it all in writing—I'll have a stenographer on hand."

A stenographer! Judith started with eagerness, and Mr. Fenno turned to her. "What do you say?" he asked. "Will you help us?"

Her eyes sparkled. "Gladly!" she cried.

"Good!" he said bluffly. "Nine o'clock at my office. Pease, have everybody there, except Mather, at three; George at half-past." Pease nodded, and Mr. Fenno smote him on the shoulder. "Come, cheer up, man! Everything is clear at last."

But Pease could not smile. "In such a way!" he grumbled.

"Through no fault of ours." Then Mr. Fenno turned to Beth. "Beth, I leave him to you." And next he looked on Judith with a sudden change of manner, losing both his animation and his cynicism, and becoming very grave. "To-morrow," he said, "you shall see what you have done."

"I?" she asked in astonishment. "I, sir?" But he merely nodded, and hastened away.

And Pease was left to Beth. Reminded by Fenno's words that his three days were nearly at an end, he forgot Price, forgot Mather, and remembered only a letter which suddenly seemed to be burning a hole in his pocket. Miss Cynthia and Judith left him alone in the parlour with Beth, who for a while watched with amusement his nervous movements about the room. She tried to make him talk, but failed.

"Something is very much on your mind," she said at last.

"Everything is!" he exclaimed in desperation, and dragged out the letter. "Won't you—will you—read this, to-night?" He put the letter in her hand, and moved toward the door.

"Why do you go?" she asked innocently, opening the envelope.

He had reached the threshold. "I will come again."

But she poised the paper in her hand and looked at him reflectively. "I don't think you'd better go," she said, and then added positively, "No, I can't have you go. Please sit down in that chair."

Obeying the nod of her determined little head, he dragged himself from the door, sat down, and watched her miserably while she studied his letter. She read it once, and sat with pursed lips; she read it again, and knit her brows; she read it a third time and looked at him thoughtfully. Then she read parts of it aloud.

"I apprehend much unhappiness to you in your proposed occupation . . . Admirable qualities—tender nature . . . Am emboldened to say what otherwise I might not . . . if you will give yourself into my care, I will promise you that so far as it is

possible for a man to avert them, you will never know trouble or need——”

She broke off, and looked at him. “This is a proposal of marriage, Mr. Pease?”

He shivered. “I meant it so.”

She put the letter in her lap with a regretful sigh. “I thought that when a man asked a girl to marry him he always said something about—his feelings for her.”

“But respect, admiration——” he was beginning eagerly.

“Oh,” she interrupted, “those go without saying. And I understand,” she glanced at the letter, “that you write this only because you wish to relieve me of work. It is very good of you to sacrifice yourself.”

“It is no sacrifice!” he cried.

She folded the note and thrust it into its envelope. “I never believed,” she said emphatically, “in proposals by letter.”

“I am sorry,” faltered miserable Pease.

“And what you say,” continued Beth, holding the note out for him to take, “is not my idea of the essentials of a proposal.”

He came and received the letter, but could answer nothing.

“I think,” Beth set forth reflectively, “that just two things are necessary to a proposal: a statement and a question. A man need only say: ‘I love you. Will you marry me?’ Just seven words—no more.” She folded her hands in her lap, looked at him innocently, and waited.

Gazing at her, fascinated, slowly he grew red. An idea found lodgment, worked deeper, penetrated to the springs of action. He crushed the letter in his hand. “I love you!” he cried. “Will you marry me?”

She dimpled into smiles. “Yes,” said little Beth.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHICH IS IN SOME RESPECTS SATISFACTORY

JUDITH sat in Mr. Fenno's little office, while in the larger room the magnates were slowly gathering. She was deeply interested in the result of the coming meeting, a little anxious as well, on account of the last words which Mr. Fenno had said to her.

"Do you think George will accept?" he had asked.

"Why should he not?" she returned, startled.

"You see no reason?" were his words as he left her.

She puzzled to find a reason until, in the outer office, Mr. Fenno's deep voice began to address the little meeting. Before him sat, in two groups, the financiers and the reform politicians, whose interests were to be reconciled. They had, between them, the power to make a new railway president and a new mayor, but never yet had the two groups of men worked together.

"We all know why we are here," Mr. Fenno began. "A holy crusade is our object—or the protection of our interests."

"It is not your interests that influence you," said one of the reformers. "We are glad to see, Mr. Fenno, that you are moved by righteous indignation. This recent tragedy—" But Mr. Fenno stopped him by a sudden gesture.

"My stenographer," and he emphasised the word, "my stenographer is within hearing. If we require any other agreements than I have prepared, she can copy them." He saw the glances which his friends exchanged

at the news of Judith's presence; moved by the sudden reference to her misfortunes, his heavy voice trembled as he proceeded. "We all have our—wrongs to avenge, and a good friend to place in his proper position. Before Mr. Mather comes, suppose we arrive at an understanding."

"Suppose," rejoined the leader of the reformers, "Mr. Fenno makes a statement of his expectations. It seems to me," he said when the explanation was forthcoming, "that the Good Government League is expected to give more than it receives."

"It is more blessed——" quoted Mr. Fenno drily.

"Can't we," put in Pease mildly, "give concessions on either side? I think we need each other."

"It is just this," said Mr. Fenno to the reformers: "Lend us your candidate to straighten out our tangle, and we'll lend him back to straighten yours."

"Is it possible," was the doubtful question, "that a president of the street-railroad can stand for mayor without raising suspicion of his motives?"

"Mather can," answered Pease promptly.

"Certainly with less suspicion than Ellis arouses," supplemented Mr. Fenno. "Come, will you lose a chance to defeat Ellis on his first line of battle? He will be beaten all the easier on his second."

"We are thinking of Mr. Mather's standing before the public," replied the reformers. "He must resign from your presidency as soon as we nominate him."

"Very well."

"That suits you?"

"Yes, if you will release him from his promise to you now."

"We will, if you will support him then."

"Here is an agreement covering these points," said Mr. Fenno. "Shall we put our names to this?"

It was on a scene of paper-signing, then, that Mather entered. Some of the gentlemen looked up and nodded to him; others—they were all his seniors—continued passing the papers around the table. He paused with his hand upon the door-knob.

"Am I in the way?" he asked.

"Everything is decided without you," answered Mr. Fenno. "We have merely disposed of your time for the next eighteen months."

Mather laughed, threw off his coat, and took a chair. They explained matters to him; in her seclusion Judith listened long before she heard him say a word. Then he began to ask questions, deep and far-reaching, but every difficulty had been considered beforehand.

"And my obligations to you, Mr. Pease?" he said once. "I was not to quit the Electrolytic Company until the fall."

"I have arranged all that," Pease replied. "The new Chebasset manager is very satisfactory; we will promote him."

"Well, what do you say?" asked Fenno, when every point had been covered.

Mather sat thoughtful for a while. "I may understand," he asked at length, "that your proposition amounts to approval of my former course as president of the street-railway?"

They assured him that it did.

"I should pursue," he next said, "the same policy. In place of Mr. Ellis's subway bill, which was this morning thrown out of the legislature, I should at once introduce another."

"Different in plan?" some one inquired.

"Quite," Mather answered, smiling. "Having no real estate to condemn at high prices, I have no desire for the privilege of eminent domain."

"Have you any objection," they asked him, "to serving in these two positions in such quick succession?"

He smiled again. "Are you sure you can elect me to either?"

"Suppose we can?" returned Mr. Fenno.

"Supposing you can," began Mather—then stopped to think.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Fenno after a moment's impatience.

Mather roused himself. "Supposing that you can elect me," he said seriously, "there is just one thing I wish to lay before you—a statement of my personal feelings. We all know each other well, we have the same interests, we know and say things which are not given to the public. I wish to define my position exactly." He paused and looked at the attentive faces. In her little office Judith asked herself with sudden alarm: "Will he refuse?"

"The personal element," he went on, "has recently entered into my relations with Mr. Ellis. There are distresses which I and—friends of mine, have suffered through him, by actions which make him morally, if not legally, criminal. Some of you know that what I say is true."

He looked at Pease, who nodded; Fenno did the same, but no one spoke. Mather began again with increasing energy, yet slowly, struggling for an exact statement of his position. "I have," he said, "and acknowledge freely, reason for the bitterest personal dislike of Mr. Ellis. And for that reason, considering the possibility of the proposals which you make to me, it has sometimes seemed to me as if I ought to refuse you——"

"You must consider——" cried Pease, half rising from his chair. But Mather held up a hand to stay him.

"And yet," he said, as Pease sank back again, "I

recognise the situation here. Long ago I expressed my disapproval of Mr. Ellis as a public man, and opposed him before—certain circumstances arose. Besides, I am the man (excuse me if I say it) that best can meet this strike; and again, a successful fight must be made for mayor in the fall. I believe that I can win there for you. So if it comes to a question between my personal feelings and my duties as a citizen, then—if you will believe my honesty in this confession, and in trusting myself to oppose Mr. Ellis without vindictiveness—if you will believe this, and will fight him with me not as a man but as a force, an evil force, then I will sign this document with you.”

In her little room Judith found herself trembling in response to the emotion which had vibrated in his voice; but in the larger office the gentlemen rose from their chairs, crowded around Mather, and in enthusiasm promised him their support. No one noticed the noise of the opening of the outer door; it was a full minute before the first of them perceived the figure which, attentive and sneering, watched them. It was Ellis.

He heard their words and knew their purposes, yet he had guessed beforehand what they had gathered there to do. By one of those bold strokes which had so often succeeded for him, he had come among them in the attempt to conciliate a strong minority. He had expected to arouse consternation, yet on perceiving him they looked at each other as if welcoming his presence. Still ignorant of Price's treachery, he did not understand the sign.

“Twelve good men and true,” he said, coming forward. “Is this an inquest?”

“A funeral,” Mr. Fenno replied. “Some one whom we know is dead and cold. Will you not pronounce the benediction?”

"Ah, I am not qualified," Ellis said. "But learning that you were here in great distress of mind, I came to see if I could not relieve you. I hope you will excuse the interruption?"

"Willingly," Mr. Fenno answered, with much cheerfulness.

Then Ellis changed his tone; dropping the banter, he looked upon them frankly. "Seriously, I understand that you are here to discuss what you regard as mismanagement in the street-railway. I know I come without invitation, yet I wish to make an offer. You have large interests in the road, I dislike to exclude a minority from any voice in affairs, and so I came to say that if you wish more representation on the next board of directors——"

"Then we shall have it?" interrupted Mr. Fenno. "Gentlemen, is not Mr. Ellis very kind?"

Ellis noted the sustained irony, and as those present murmured their responses to the question he saw in them no conciliatory spirit. They looked at him with that inquiring reserve which was not difficult to meet in them singly, but which, thus directed at him by a group of the blue-bloods, became irritatingly oppressive. And there was more in its meaning than ever before. Suddenly he asked himself if these men could be stronger than he had thought. He had been very busy all the morning with messages to and from the capital in regard to his bill, and with the strike. If anything had happened on exchange——

The serious voice of Pease began to speak. "I imagine that Mr. Ellis, in studying the market reports to-day, failed to remark a transfer which was recorded three minutes before the closing time. Otherwise he would scarcely have come here."

The inquiring glances of the others grew keener,

pressing upon Ellis almost physically as those present watched for the effect of Pease's words. Standing alone against them, Ellis felt a sudden sense of impending calamity, between his temples a pressure began, and in the silence his voice was scarcely audible as in spite of himself he asked hoarsely: "What do you mean?"

"History," answered Pease slowly—never in his life before had he been deliberately cruel—"history, Mr. Ellis, has taught some valuable lessons, of which I should like to call two to your attention. One is that some great men meet their Waterloo, the other that some little men have their—Price!"

Something flashed before Ellis's eyes, and in that flash he saw the whole treachery. His head dropped, his eyes closed, and his jaw shut convulsively. "Price! Price!" he hissed.

Then in an instant he stood upright and faced them without flinching. Though he saw the whole meaning of the news, though he realised the power of the caste which, so long supine, at last had risen up against him, even though he knew he faced two great defeats, he looked upon his adversaries, and they saw courage in his glance. He turned to Mather.

"Mather," said Ellis, "you think you've got me."

He felt, as that same quiet glance looked down on him, the continual irritation of it, the impossibility of ever attaining that superb indifference. And then the answer: "For the present I have." Would they never boast, these aristocrats—never threaten? First, despising him, they had left him alone; even now when they turned on him they still looked down on him. A torrent of words rushed to his lips, and yet, feeling how powerless he was to impress those silent, attentive spectators, he checked himself.

"For the present!" he repeated, and turned to go.

In his unfamiliar surroundings he mistook the door and opened one leading into a little office where, facing him across a table, he saw—who was that? Pale, intent, startled at his entrance, Judith Blanchard rose and confronted him. For a moment he stared as at a portent.

Then quickly he closed the door and turned to the men at his back. Fenno and Pease had started forward; with Mather, they were the nearest to him. He eyed them one by one. "So," he said, pointing to the little room, "*that* is why you are all here!"

They made no answer. "Because I wish to enter your homes, is it," he asked, "that you combine against me? Because I nearly succeeded, I frightened you?"

Mather did not understand, Pease and Fenno had no reply to make, but Ellis, feeling with pain that he had pronounced a truth against himself, waited for no answer. "But wait!" he cried, stamping. "I have avoided you, favoured you at times, but now I am against you in everything. I will go out of my way to meet you. What you wish, I shall oppose; what you build, I shall throw down; what you bring in, I shall throw out! For everything you win, you must pay; I will weary you of fighting. I will plan while you sleep, act while you rest, work while you play. Your virtue shall be a load to you, and I will tire your vigilance!"

He flung his phrases like bombs, to burst among his adversaries; casting his prophecies in their faces, he startled his opponents from their reserve. Then, turning, he rushed from the office, leaving them staring at each other as if a whirlwind had passed.

One by one Mather's supporters left the office, each renewing his promise of assistance, yet each subdued by the thoughts aroused by Ellis's amazing words. For

they recognised a challenge which would be hard to meet—to be as persistent in their efforts as Ellis should be with his, to meet his subtlety, to foresee his plans, to counteract his influence, to expose his methods. And having businesses, having families, loving repose and pleasure, only the reformers, those modern Puritans, could promise the self-denial necessary to meet Ellis's unceasing activities.

Pease, Fenno, and Mather at last remained in the office. "Tremendous!" sighed Pease, breaking a period of thought which the departure of Ellis had inaugurated for him.

"Tremendous!" repeated Fenno.

"Are we equal to it?" asked Mather seriously.

Mr. Fenno recovered his cynicism. "Sufficient to the day is its weevil," he answered. "Grubs breed fast, but they can be killed. I am going home."

The three put on their coats. "We are going the same way, I suppose?" Mather remarked.

"Pease and I have something to talk over," replied Mr. Fenno. "Yes we have, Pease! None of your confounded straightforwardness. You must give us a start, George; five minutes' law, if you please. And I should like you to wait," he pointed to the door of the inner office, "in that room. Good-evening."

"Good-evening," repeated Pease, and followed Mr. Fenno out.

Thought Mather: "What under the sun——" He opened the door of the little room. "Judith!"

There she sat and looked at him; on her cheeks were traces of tears, but her eyes were bright as they met his. He looked from her to the uncovered typewriter, the pencils and note-book. "So it was you," he said, "that Ellis saw before he turned upon us so?"

She nodded, looking on him silently.

"What is it?" he asked, coming a step nearer. "You look—Judith, are you ill?"

Suddenly she rose and held out her hands to him. "Oh, George," she cried, "I am so glad for you!"

"Oh," he said, relieved, "I was afraid that—Judith, you have been crying. Is anything wrong? Was the work hard?" She shook her head. "Then this meeting has distressed you?"

Unashamed, she wiped her cheeks. "It is not that."

"Come to the window," he said, for the early twilight was falling. But when he studied her in the stronger light he saw nothing in her eyes except a resolute cheerfulness; the unwonted pink in her cheeks might be the reflection of the sunset glow.

"Nothing is wrong with me," she said, and took her jacket from the hook on the wall. "I suppose Mr. Fenno will not want me any more to-day, so I may as well go home." Yet while Mather helped her to put on the jacket, the knowledge that he was studying her set her nerves to trembling, and it was by an effort that she controlled herself.

"You are under some strain," he said with decision. "Did Ellis frighten you?"

She answered, "I have no fear of him." Drawing her gloves from her pocket, she tried to put them on, but her hands trembled visibly. She abandoned the attempt at concealment, and turned to him.

"It's just that I'm glad for you, George, and proud of you, and—I've been making an acknowledgment to myself, that's all. Now shall we go home?"

But he took her hand and kept her face toward the window. "I should like to hear that acknowledgment, if I may?"

Perhaps the colours deepened in the sky; at any rate, her cheeks grew rosier as she looked away

from him, out above the roofs. "If you wish to know," she answered.

"I wish it very much."

She folded her hands before her tightly; they showed white against her dress. "No one else will hear," she began uncertainly, "although every one else heard your confession, George. I heard, and somehow you set me thinking of the time we met in the Golf Club, long ago, last April."

"Last April," he repeated, and added with meaning, "Long ago."

Her voice grew stronger. "I will tell you everything," she said. "You will see what a foolish girl I have been—how proud I was. We spoke then of the world, and you warned me of it; you said that it was very big, and strong, and merciless."

"I remember," Mather said.

"But I did not believe," Judith went on. "I thought that you—you had just lost this presidency, George—I thought that you were cowed. And I thought that I was braver than you, and stronger than you, and I believed that I—I, George!—could conquer the world!"

She made a little gesture of amazement at herself; gravely attentive, he did not speak. Then she pointed down at her black dress, swept her hand toward the typewriter, and exclaimed: "And this is the result! But I know myself now, George, and I am glad you made me say this, for I want to beg your pardon."

"There is no need of that," he answered.

"Then," she asked, "shall we go?"

"Not yet," he replied. But he continued looking at her without saying more, and to cover her embarrassment she said:

"Just let me tell you first that Mr. Fenno has engaged

me permanently, and I feel that I have started a new life, George."

She was attempting to be gay, a difficult task in the face of his continued serious scrutiny; but to her relief he spoke. "A new life? Why, that leads to an old subject, Judith. And what you have said makes me hope that some day I may begin a new life, too."

"Yours begins next week," she said, "with the stockholders' meeting."

"It begins," he returned, "whenever you say the word." She turned abruptly aside from him and looked out of the window; there could now be no doubt whence came the colour that flooded her face and even touched her ears with coral. He came close to her side.

"See," he said, pointing out the window. "The sun is going down. Shall it not rise again on a new life for us both?"

"George," she answered, "how can I marry any one?"

"You are thinking," he asked, "of your debt to Ellis?"

She nodded. "How can I so burden you?"

He laughed. "I can pay the money out of hand; I can earn it again in three years. Jacob served seven years for Rachel: will you not let me work a little while for you?" He tried to draw her to him. "Judith! Judith!"

Suddenly she turned and nestled to him. "Oh, hold me!" she sobbed. "Take care of me always!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONTAINS ANOTHER PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE, AND
SETTLES AN OLD SCORE

THE whirling in Ellis's head was ceasing, the blind restlessness was slowly leaving him. Yet still he walked up and down in his library, unmindful of the call of hunger. For as his anger left him there grew in its place the unassuageable yearning which he was coming to know too well, and which he was ashamed that he could not master. For there had never been a desire which he could not crush, or a passion which he could not uproot, if they stood in the way of his purposes. In his courtship of Judith he had taken care to suppress the feelings which, apart from his appreciation of her material value, occasionally threatened to interfere with his entirely deliberate progress in her regard and her father's favour. But now, when all was over, the little pains and longings which he had crushed down were constantly rising, and he who had been so self-sufficing was now lonely, he who had never paused to regret was often bowed with despair. And Judith, Judith was in his mind constantly; it was she who broke his sleep, spoiled his work, and had brought about his defeat. His rage at the disaster was not so deep as the disturbance which the sight of her had caused in him. But even that he would, he must, repress—or where would she, that pale girl, bring him?

Three times in the past month had this confusion of the faculties come upon him. Wherever lay the cause,

the result was too costly to be permitted to continue. He recognised the fits now; the next one that came he would meet at its beginning—and this one should end at once. What was he thinking of? His men must have the news already; they had come to the house and he had sent them away, playing the fool here by himself. Well, he would go out and find them now, hearten them, and prepare at once for the long fight with which he had threatened his enemies. Ah—and he ground his teeth with anticipation—he meant all that he had said.

His faculties collected at last, he turned to the door, and met the cautious face of his butler.

"A lady, sir," said the man, prepared to be damned from the room. He was relieved when his master said: "Show her in."

But the lady, having no intention of being turned away, was close behind. "Very wise of you," she said, entering even as he spoke. "Because I meant to come in anyway, Stephen."

"Oh, it's you, Lydia?" asked Ellis, darting a look before which the butler retired. "What brings you?"

Mrs. Harmon unwound the long scarf from her neck, and stood before him smiling. "An errand of mercy, to comfort the broken-hearted. Come, don't scowl." She unbuckled her cloak, swung it from her shoulders, and tossed it on a chair. "There, how do you like me?"

In spite of his mood he caught his breath. For she was dressed in black and adorned with pearls; the dress was cut so low that it more than suggested the charms which it concealed. And those which it revealed were perfect: the full and rosy throat, the shoulders, and the arms. The pearls set off the blackness of the dress, and took to themselves the warmth of her skin. For a moment Ellis looked at her with pleasure, then he recovered himself.

"Full mourning, I see," he grunted.

"Don't be disagreeable," she returned. "It's my best and newest. Come, say I never looked so well before."

"You never did," he agreed. Always Lydia had dressed, he reflected, as much as she dared; now that she was free she evidently intended to go the limit. "It certainly becomes you," he added.

"I may sit down?" she asked. "Thanks. Now, Stephen, I want to talk business."

"Talk," he said, sitting before her. "It's about——"

"This afternoon's news. Oh, yes," as he turned his eyes away, "it's got to me already. Some of your men, not getting in here, came to see me. How did it happen, Stephen?"

"Price," he answered between his teeth. "By God, I——" The curse and the threat died away, and he sat staring at the carpet.

"Oh," she cried, "and I warned you of him!"

"Well," he growled, "it's over. I'm not looking back."

She leaned toward him earnestly. "Are you looking ahead? You're not giving up, are you?"

"No!" he cried scornfully.

"Good!" she responded, relieved, but then she asked: "What has got into you? Three times you've shut yourself up so."

"Never again," he assured her. "It's all over, Lydia. I shall never spend any more time—regretting."

"I thought so," she said. "It's Judith?"

"Yes," he acknowledged savagely. "I've taken a little time to be a fool. Now I'm over it."

"If you are," she replied, "I'll tell you something."

"What next?" he asked, his face darkening.

"I went by the Peases' at half-past five," she began

slowly, watching him. "I was on the other side of the street. You know it's almost dark at that hour?"

"Oh, tell me!" he commanded.

"I saw two people at the door," she went on more rapidly. "They were George Mather and Judith. They opened the door, the hall was lighted inside, and I saw their figures against the light. As they went in—it wasn't much, but he put his arm around her."

Ellis started abruptly from his chair, went to his desk, and stood looking down at it; his back was to her. "I thought you said you were over it," she remarked.

As abruptly he returned and took his seat. "I expected that."

"Well," she asked, "and now what?"

"Work," he replied. "I can always have plenty of that."

"Work?" she repeated. "Like the man in the novel who works to forget?" She pointed her finger at him, teasingly, and laughed. "Stephen, I do believe you were in love with her!"

He scowled his contempt at the weak phrase. In love with her! But then its central word struck home with the force of a new idea, and involuntarily he rose again from his seat. Her laughter stopped; her gayety changed to alarm, for he was looking at her, but he saw nothing.

"What is it?" she asked uneasily.

Love? Love! He understood. "I loved her!" he said, and then added quietly, "I love her!"

She bridled and looked down. "I too have been through that, Stephen."

But he stood staring before him. He loved!—and all was clear to him. Thence came those pains, those harsh distresses, those unappeasable longings; thence

the distraction which caused his failure. Judith had set this poison in his blood. He laughed mirthlessly. How the girl had revenged herself!

But he loved! Relief came to him as he realised that no ordinary weakness, but the higher lot of man (so he had heard it called) was overpowering him. He had never been fond of any one in his life, and yet he loved! Love! That was a passion he had never expected to meet; there was no shame in falling before it—and he felt in his pain even a fierce delight. He loved the girl!

And now he knew he would never be the same man again—never could work so free of soul, never forget those high ideals of hers, nor be as mindless of the consequences of his acts. He smiled with scorn of himself as he saw how the tables had been turned on him. Meaning to win the girl, to buy her, he had instead roused a conscience, and learned that there was purity in the world. This was what they meant, then, those hitherto inexplicable fits of his: that a new nature was trying to assert itself, that a terrible discontent was aroused, that his whole life had changed, and that within an unsuspected recess of his nature there was this open wound, unhealing, draining his strength.

Where then was his boast to his enemies, of what worth his threats? Could he ever fight again as before, ever manage and plan? Again he laughed scornfully.

"You needn't laugh," complained Mrs. Harmon. "I do understand it all."

"I wasn't laughing at you," he answered. "—Well, forget all this, Lydia. What is it I can do for you?"

"Will you forget all this?" she asked with meaning. "Then look ahead with me for a while, Stephen. You won't be president."

"And I've lost my mayor," he added.

"Will it mean so much?" she asked, disappointed.

"It's Mather's year," he said decidedly. "Everything's going his way; it happens so every once in a while in New York. Then Tammany lays low; so shall I. But in the end they come in again; so with me."

"Then, planning for the future," she began, but hesitated, stopped, and started differently. "I've suffered a good deal, in this past year. We haven't got anything we wished, either you or I."

He wondered what brought her. "That is true," he said, not intending to commit himself.

"I've suffered from Judith as well as you," complained Mrs. Harmon. "She insulted me the other day; she isn't what I thought her, Stephen."

"Nor what I thought," he said, waiting.

"And the others," she went on, "turn me down, too. You would suppose that my position, and my loss—but they are colder to me than ever." She looked down.

"Look here," he said, "it isn't like you to be so mild, Lydia. Aren't you just a little mad, underneath?"

"Oh, I hate them all!" she burst out. She looked at him with flashing eyes, then asked directly, "Do you, Stephen?"

"Well, suppose I do; what then?" he asked, wishing her to show her hand.

"I will leave them," said Mrs. Harmon with vigour. "So will you. And we will leave them together."

"It won't be a formal leavetaking," he said, not understanding. "We just leave them, don't we?"

"Oh," she replied, "I can't bear just to drop out. I want them to understand that I've no more use for them." She looked to see if he comprehended, but he remained silent and his face showed nothing. "I've lost my husband," she said.

"Yes," he said, encouraging. "Go on."

She finished with an effort. "And you wanted—a wife?"

"Good God!" he said slowly.

"I could be of use to you," she explained quickly. "More than Judith. See how your men come to me for advice?"

"Your husband is but two months in his grave," he cried. "And you wear Wayne's jewels at your throat!"

"But I don't mean to do it at once," she said, aggrieved. "For a few months it could be—understood."

"I see," he said, mastering his disgust. "Anything more, Lydia?"

"And I should like to leave something to remember us by," she went on, taking confidence. "So that they shall feel that we aren't just beaten."

"How will you do it?"

"They are like a big family," she said. "Hurt one, and the others are against you. I think they combined against you out of revenge for—Judith, as much as to help Mather."

"Perhaps," he commented.

"They think a great deal of those two," she proceeded. "If we could hurt them we could anger all the others."

"How do you propose to do it?" he inquired.

"You have that note of hers," she said. "You said she could pay at her leisure, but——" she eyed him keenly. "Stephen, I never believed that."

"You are quite right," he acknowledged. "I could come down on her to-morrow for the money." He looked at Mrs. Harmon impassively, but she was satisfied.

"Then do!" she urged, rising.

"I see," he said. "If her friends have to make up

the money for her it puts her in the position of a beggar, makes her ridiculous, doesn't it?"

"More than that," she said eagerly. "If people know she has signed a note to you, they will think, don't you see, and say things."

His brows contracted, and from under them his eyes began to glow, characteristically. "What will they say?" he asked.

"Oh, there will be a great to-do, a quiet scandal, and under cover of it you—we retire with credit."

"You have thought it all out very well," he said.

"Haven't I?" she asked complacently.

"And I suppose," he said, "that I might as well begin to-morrow. In fact, I could send some kind of a summons to Miss Blanchard to-night."

"Any day, only soon," she agreed. "Before the stockholders' meeting will be best."

"Now is the time," he said. He went to his desk, stooped over it, and wrote rapidly. Then he brought her the paper. "Will that do?" He had merely written: "With the best wishes of Stephen F. Ellis."

"Why," she began doubtfully. "Oh, I see; you mean to be sarcastic. And what will you inclose with this?"

He took the note from his pocket-book and showed it to her. "For fifteen thousand dollars, you see. And it is in legal form."

"Yes," she said with satisfaction. "You'll just remind her that you have it, and demand immediate payment?"

"I will do this," he replied. He tore the note across, laid the pieces together, and tore them again, and once again. Then he folded them with the paper on which he had written.

"Stephen!" she cried.

He took an envelope from the desk and put the

papers in. "And I send it all to her. Now perhaps you understand?"

His tone was suddenly fierce, and as he approached her she backed away. "Why——" she said, astonished.

"That was a good idea of yours," he sneered, standing close to her. "Between us, we could smirch her name. You to do the talking, of course." He snatched her wrist and pushed his face close to hers. "Have you told any one I held that note?"

"No!" she answered, frightened.

"The truth!" he insisted.

"No one; no one!" she replied.

He cast her hand away, and stepped back. "If you tell any one, with that damned tongue of yours, Lydia, I'll have your blood!"

"I will never tell!" she protested, thoroughly cowed.

He turned away from her. "Let them tell if they wish," he said over his shoulder. "They won't, to save the Colonel's reputation; but if they do—you keep quiet. Fool I was to tell you!" He went to the desk again, and took up his pen to address the envelope. "Good-night, Lydia," he said absently.

"But, Stephen!" she began to plead.

"Don't provoke me," he interrupted, pausing with his pen poised. "Don't provoke me, Lydia." As she did not move, he turned on her. "Confound it, go!"

She dared not say a word to anger him further; she feared even to look her disgust, lest she should cut herself off from him forever. Taking her cloak and scarf, she went to the door; she paused there for an instant, only to see with fury that he had turned again to the desk and was writing. White with rage at her failure, she went away.

But Ellis was at peace with himself, and looked the future in the face. He loved, he would suffer, he

did not even wish to forget. Deliberately he left the house and walked to the Pease homestead. He rang the bell, gave to the servant his missive for Judith, and for a full minute after the door closed he stood on the sidewalk, looking at the lighted windows of the house. But then, shivering, he drew his coat closely around him, and hurried away from that abode of happiness.

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